



GENERATION to GENERATION

STORIES PASSED DOWN

STORIES PASSED ON

STORIES FORGOTTEN

STORIES UNTOLD

Hearts of Men
Host Editor: Nic Fine



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A HEARTS OF MEN PUBLICATION
CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

2022

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Photographs by kind permission of our contributors

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ISBN no: 978-0-620-98477-5

Date of publication: 2022

Hearts of Men previous publications:

In the hearts of men – 2015

The manhood experience (Parts one and two) – 2017

The wild at heart adventure – 2017

*‘Both intergenerational stories
(stories, guidance and influence that
we know come from prior generations)
and transgenerational messages
(stories that are secret, forgotten, not
resolved or communicated orally),
affect the lives of the receiving
generation, but the hidden nature of
transgenerational influence makes the
shadow it casts particularly powerful.’*

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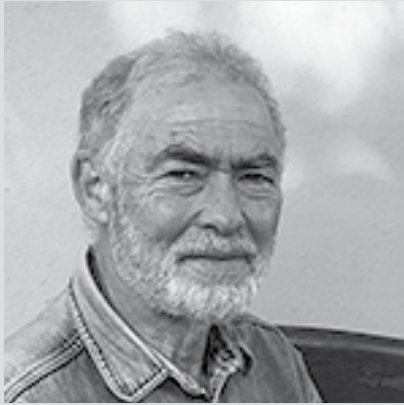
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FOREWORD

Broadening the focus

Nic Fine – Host editor

Hearts of Men (HOM) has been facilitating and supporting community-based programmes and interventions in the Western Cape (unicity of Cape Town and rural areas) for 20 years, from 2001 to 2021. Our two key focus areas have been to close the generational communication gap between older men and younger men and boys, as well as to actively engage with men in their roles as fathers to their own children, and as mentors to other young men.

We first developed a community-based Manhood Mentoring programme, in which a group of older men (over 25 years) went through intensive and rigorous personal development and mentorship training. They were followed by a group of younger men (14–19 years) who also underwent a training process, in which they explored what it means to be a young man, important relationships in their lives, and the concept of mentoring. The two groups then entered into a mentorship agreement that lasted a minimum of one year.

This model was developed further, and we created a Fatherhood Mentoring programme, based on the same principles. In this programme, older fathers mentored younger fathers and young adults in a community-based setting.

We also focused our attention on partnering with women-led initiatives and working alongside women's circles. Our aim was to support young women, who would hopefully receive the same support services as the men, to strengthen family structures and relationships in a Womanhood and Motherhood Mentoring programme.



We focused all our attention on writing up our resources and recording our experiences, to share these with the next generation of facilitators and community activists.

In 2015, we began a shift away from direct service delivery, to supporting independent community initiatives. We focused all our attention on writing up our resources and recording our experiences, so as to share these with the next generation of facilitators and community activists.

Our first book, *In the hearts of men*, was published in 2015. It describes our philosophy and methodology, and covers a wide range of topics, including working with older and younger men and women, working in communities, programme design and leadership.

In 2018, we published three comprehensive HOM training resources: *The manhood experience* (Parts 1 & 2) and *The wild at heart adventure*. These manuals include detailed coverage of the content of our intensive courses, as well as matters of logistics and planning, team preparation and debriefing.

With this, our final publication, *Generation to generation*, we take a wider focus exploring the experiences of 13 different contributors all connected in some way to this work, sharing personal stories of mentoring, parenting, family life, community programmes, and initiatives they are involved in that bring the generations together.





Elders and mentors

Fairoza Brey – Chairperson, Hearts of Men

As a trained social worker, lecturer and community development facilitator, I believe that each of us is largely shaped by our upbringing and our internalisation of social learning stimuli that we are consistently exposed to over a number of years.

Social scientists tend to believe that personality is formed by a combination of nature and nurture factors. As we develop into adulthood, our primary caregivers are the most influential people in our lives. As each of us grows mentally, for various reasons we may internalise and then possibly externalise behaviour we observe in our primary caregivers.

In essence, our elders naturally become our unofficial mentors, transferring skills, knowledge, principles, and core values to us. Of course, while mentors are generally older than mentees, this role can be swapped.

In my experience, transferences within families often take place in the absence of emotionally and physically close parents, especially fathers. These absent natural mentors may be substituted by other adults within a young person's



immediate physical environment. Some mentors have the very powerful capacity to influence the mentee in a positive or negative way – consciously or unconsciously – and you will find instances of this in these stories.

It is my fervent hope that you, the reader, will benefit from these personal narratives that have been written and shared by the contributors. I also hope that the stories will stimulate reflection on your own life as you relate to or identify with what the authors have shared. Reflection provides an opportunity to embark on a journey of personal transformation, bringing positive changes to the individual, family, and society. Reflection also creates potential for healing. I trust you will find this book an enjoyable, interesting, and meaningful read.

At this juncture, I would like to take the opportunity to thank Nic Fine, founding member of Hearts of Men, a dear colleague, honourable board member, and friend who has been champion host editor for this publication. I am of the firm opinion that this book would not have been possible without his unwavering determination, relentless dedication, and soulful passion. Thank you, Nic, for seeing this project to fruition.

Fairoza Brey

Cape Town – 2022

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PREFACE

Nic Fine – Co-founding member, Hearts of Men

I see a middle-aged man passing by my window. He is pushing a pram with a small boy in it, probably his grandchild. One generation pushing another. I wonder what he is thinking as he strolls by; what his story is. I wonder if this man was ever pushed in a pram by his grandfather – or indeed by his own father. How well did he know his grandparents? Did he know them at all? What was his relationship like with his father? And his mother? What will become of this child, looking ahead as he sits in the pram, as his grandfather walks behind him, gently propelling him forward?

One generation walking behind the next.

One generation accompanying, supporting, guiding the next.

One generation as a gift, an inspiration, a blessing to the next.

And for some, one generation a burden, a weight, a curse to the next.

From generation to generation – walking past my window, and also sitting inside me, in my heart and mind, running through my veins. Generations past, my grandmothers and grandfathers, my own mother and father, all sitting right behind me, together with me as I write. Their teachings, influences, guidance, living inside me. This book is dedicated to them, now all long gone.

This book is also dedicated to all the living members of my family as well as my friends, colleagues, participants and mentors, young and old, who have supported, inspired and guided me from childhood to young adulthood, from fatherhood to elderhood.

The core of this book is about mentoring; looking at different ways one generation guides and supports the next, mentoring, parenting, guiding, and empowering.

I include stories from my own journey, demonstrating people and events that



influenced and shaped me. I have been involved in mentoring work over the past 40 years, a partner and husband to my wife for the past 32 years, and a parent to my two sons for the past 27 years.

I also include contributions from men and women who have worked alongside me or whose paths I crossed. Each has a unique story to tell about generational influence and mentoring. All have left an impression on me because of how they live in the world and how they influence those around them. I admire their amazing work and the outstanding service they deliver to others. The common thread that connects all these individuals is their creativity, energy and commitment.

Like the man with the pram, we all are simply 'passing by'. What we do as we go on our way through this world can make a difference, and what we do as we pass by one another can really matter.

Storytelling has been fundamental to our work in Hearts of Men. We believe that everyone has a story to tell, but that some stories never get told as there is no one to listen, or no safe place to tell them. Too often we do not set aside the time to simply listen. Many family and individual stories go missing as one generation makes way for the next. The time is often never made, nor the opportunity created, for the telling of the story.

So, this book uses storytelling as its form of communication. These are stories told from the heart; stories of lives lived. Stories long forgotten and buried. Stories remembered, reinterpreted, put to rest. Stories that inspired – of loss and triumph, breakdown and resilience, transformation. Human stories. Our stories. We do hope you enjoy them!

Nic Fine

Cape Town – 2022

*What we do as we go
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*Indeed, most of us are
'standing on the shoulders
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what might be possible.*

DEDICATION

The influence that one generation can have on the next can never be underestimated. So often our achievements are made possible by the struggles and perseverance of those who came before us. Without their contributions and sacrifices, the opportunities that were made available to us would not have been possible. Indeed, most of us are 'standing on the shoulders of giants' that came before us – those women and men who stood up to be counted, lead the way, and inspired us to believe in what might be possible.

Our first book, *In the hearts of men*, was dedicated to Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela. It was written during his final days and published soon after his passing.

In his lifetime, Mandela spoke about the power of sport to unite a nation, bringing people from diverse backgrounds together in support of one team. When South Africa won the 1995 Rugby World Cup, President Mandela congratulated the Springbok captain Francois Pienaar, saying, 'Thank you, Francois, for what you and your team have done for our country.' Pienaar replied, 'No, thank you, Mr President, for what you have done for our country.' Without Mandela's contribution and sacrifice, that World Cup victory and, indeed, the Springboks' participation in it, would not have been possible.

In 2019 in Japan, 24 years later, the Springboks once again raised the World Cup; but this time with a hugely transformed and representative team led by Siyamthanda



Kolisi, the first black Springbok captain. And his fellow team member, Makazole Mapimpi, became the very first Springbok to score a try in a World Cup final. Both Kolisi and Mapimpi had reached the pinnacle of a previously white-dominated sport. Both came from extremely disadvantaged and tough social circumstances. Nelson Mandela would surely be smiling down with immense pride on the achievements of these two sportsmen.

Kaunda Ntunja (isiXhosa television commentator) described Mapimpi's decisive score as a 'thing of beauty' by the player who had possibly come from the most hopeless situation in the history of Springbok rugby. Matthew Pearce (English television commentator) described the winning team as one that celebrated its diversity and would surely inspire many future generations. Mkhuseleli Eric Songwile (Siya Kolisi's first rugby coach) shared that he had always thought Siya would go far because as a young boy Siya had shown passion and dedication and was a good listener, which is why the coach had taken a greater interest in him.

We would like to dedicate our second book to Siyamthanda Kolisi and Makazole Drex Mapimpi, and to all those men and women who guided, supported and inspired them to reach the very top of their profession, to be trailblazers and role models to the next generation of young sportsmen and women.

*Both Kolisi and Mapimpi
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INTRODUCTION

Nic Fine

The invitation

I am sure the expression 'from generation to generation' conjures up many different thoughts, emotions and images. When I think of a strong image that embodies this for me, I am reminded of an invitation I once received while I was part of a think tank of men who were developing a programme for young men. We had come together to share our knowledge and skills, and to design a powerful experience. We hoped that the young men involved in the programme would pass on the experience to the next generation of young men.

One night, we were gathered in a circle around a blazing fire that we saw as a symbol of what we had shared and created together, and of what we hoped our work could achieve. The flames eventually subsided, and each of us sat in the darkness, staring at the red-hot embers as they gradually released all their energy and died out but were still too hot to handle. We spent the night close to these coals to keep ourselves warm. The following morning, we were each invited to choose a coal, wrap it up safely in a small piece of cloth, and take it away with us. The next time each of us was gathered around a different fire with another group of men, we would add our small coal to that fire to connect the two – the old and the new. And then, once that fire was extinguished, all those gathered would be invited to take away one tiny piece to add to their next fire, wherever that might be. In this way our original fire, our vision, would keep spreading and gathering a much wider sphere of influence.

So, many fires and years later, I am thinking back to the tiny coal I took away from that communal fire and to that circle of men who passed on their skills to many other circles of men: generation to generation, fire to fire.



Bridging the generation gap and breaking destructive generational cycles

Working with the concept ‘from generation to generation’ has two distinct aspects to it. Firstly, it is to bring the generations closer together and, secondly, it is to break destructive patterns that might have been passed down from one generation to another. These aspects have both been integral to Hearts of Men’s work.

Hearts of Men (HOM) has aimed to bridge the gap between generations by encouraging and supporting older men to provide mentoring to younger men. This is done through creating community circles in which younger and older men spend time together, share their life experiences, and learn from one another. Through connecting and re-connecting the generations, HOM has aimed to use the skills, experiences, and wisdom of the elders to add value to the lives of young people. There is no doubt that the young generation has also, in turn, made a huge contribution to the lives of their elders.

HOM has also attempted to break destructive cycles or patterns that are often passed down from one generation to the next. These may include feelings of guilt or shame, lack of education, low self-esteem, addictions, violence and abuse, and crime. Many of our most challenging social issues today are caused by the breakdown and widening gap in the relationships between elders and youth, parents and children. The traditional role that grandparents have played within the family is, in many situations, being eroded. As a society we

are losing out on the wealth of experience to be gained by integrating elders more actively in our family, community, and working environments. Conversely, the approach that elders and ‘the elderly’ are no longer ‘useful’ to us as a society provides for isolation, lack of purpose, and despair in the lives of many older folk. Acknowledgement of the role of elders is of critical importance. The sharing of lived experience and past mistakes by elders to the next generation has great value.

The dramatic technological changes in the past 50 years or so have caused the generational gap to widen. The ways in which we interact, communicate, and work have changed radically. While young people’s grasp of technological advances is strong, many of these innovations leave the older generation bewildered. This does, however, provide for a special opportunity, whereby the youth can educate and support senior citizens in comprehending these changes and becoming more confident in using computers and technology in general.

I remember a beautiful image. It was a photograph of a young woman standing next to an old man; both were smiling. They each wore T-shirts with a message: ‘Talk to old people, they know cool stuff you don’t’ was printed on the T-shirt worn by the old man, and ‘Talk to young people, they know cool stuff you don’t’ was printed on the T-shirt worn by the young woman.

We believe there is a place for mentoring across all ages – elders, adults, youth and children. In this book, we explore some examples of such mentoring relationships, recognising the significant and diverse roles that are being played across the generations.



These include:

- Innovators (those who provide us with new ways)
- Influencers (those who mobilise support)
- Trailblazers (those who lead the way)
- Disruptors (those who shake things up)
- Healers (those who put things back together again)
- Mentors (those who guide, assist and support).

Some years ago, a colleague based in the UK challenged me to find a name that describes people that do this inter-generational work. She said every other profession has a name, why not this one? After much discussion, a new name did emerge for those individuals who actively facilitate the interaction between old and young. We decided to call them 'generational practitioners' (with reference to medical GPs in general practice). Using this term provides a clear focus on this important role in a non-medical context and acknowledges the crucial work 'GPs' do in enabling social cohesion and the transfer of learning and life experience from one generation to another. The notion of being a 'GP' is not age specific; young people also play a pivotal role in keeping the connection with their elders alive, vibrant and meaningful. It is often stated that 'young people are the leaders of tomorrow'. We subscribe to the belief that young people be 'the leaders of today'. They do not need to wait for their time. Their time is now. The experience of leading needs to be put in motion right now.

As the writer George Bernard Shaw once said, all that young people can do for the old is to shock them and keep them up to date!

Core concepts underpinning our thinking

- Every man and woman has a story to tell.
- Stories that are passed on fulfil an important role in transferring knowledge, teachings, and cultural and historical perspectives from one generation to another.
- Stories that are hidden or kept secret hold power and influence over one generation by another.
- Young people and their elders have much to contribute and learn from one another.
- The role of elders is to provide a 'holding space' for young people within which they can develop, grow, and reach their potential.
- The role of young people is to 'shake things up' by questioning and challenging their elders' ways of thinking and of doing things.
- Bridging the 'generation gap' is for the benefit of both young and old. There is an untapped, often unexplored intergenerational potential that, if harnessed, can have significant benefits for us as individuals and as a society.





Getting into the hearts of men

Our approach is well documented in our first book, *In the hearts of men*, and in our experiential training manuals. We don't deliver lectures on how to be a good man, or on the terrible things that men have done and still do. We know we must get to the heart of the matter, down to the very roots of the violence, of the abuse. We must get deep into men's stories and listen – opening up frozen hearts, letting anger out, slowly building up self-esteem, letting go of shame and self-loathing. We have learnt that if we don't do this and deal only with the behaviour at a surface level, no real progress is made in reducing male violence, addiction, abuse, and terror.

Our goal through our work has always been to serve women and girls – so that they live in a world where they are safer from the men in their families and communities, free from gender stereotyping and inequality. But to get there, we know we must focus on and serve men first to deal with men's issues. Only then can we make the difference we all wish to see.

The focus of this book

The focus of this book is wider than the scope of work done by HOM. The contributors, women and men who are all experienced mentors themselves, share their stories about people who have influenced their lives, mentored them, or played a key role in their professional development. Through these stories we explore various roles that elders play in the lives of young people as mentors, parents, teachers or coaches. Conversely, we also touch upon the roles that young people play in the lives of the older generation and in the lives of children younger than themselves. We look at some examples of 'meeting points', whereby the generations can interact and engage with one another.

In these chapters, we share stories about some programmes that have grown and sustained themselves over many years through mentoring and developing leadership, and successfully transitioning from one generation of leaders to another.

We include stories about some individuals who have successfully moved on from HOM, using their learnings and experiences to develop their own independent programmes or organisations. We also include stories about individuals who were born in the United Kingdom or in other African countries, and who work outside of HOM.

We explore through personal stories, a broader array of mentoring approaches: formal and informal; elders who provide a 'holding space' to youth; planned and structured mentoring; interpersonal and spontaneous mentoring; and the spaces where parenting and mentoring overlap.

Many of the stories reveal the back story – what lies behind this work, those who have guided mentors on their journeys, and lessons we have learnt through engaging with this work.



Some questions we asked our contributors

- Who has mentored you?
- What specific roles have mentors played in your life?
- What influence has the mentoring you have received had on you?
- In what ways has mentoring changed your life?
- Are you involved in mentoring? Can you describe the mentoring relationships you do have?
- Have you a specific message regarding giving or receiving mentoring that you would like to share?
- How would you describe the inter-generational connections and interactions you have experienced in your life, from childhood through to where you are now – both negative and positive?
- From your experience, what community, family or social structures have been in place to encourage mixing and interacting between the generations?
- What ideas do you have for creating more of these opportunities and spaces in which this engagement across generations can occur?

In our diversity we work together

There is no doubt that, in so many ways, South Africa is still a deeply a divided society. We inherited these geographic, social, and economic divisions from the generations that came before us. To bridge these divisions is our challenge and will most likely be the challenge facing the generation that comes after us as well.

We are also a country of people who are richly diverse in race, religion, culture, language, and backgrounds. Our HOM management team of three men and one woman who have produced this book represent this rich diversity: Muslim, Jew, Christian – with family heritages that stretch from Eastern Europe, Asia, and Central Africa to the southern tip of Africa. Like many other South Africans, in our diversity we work together to make our country and community a better place – hoping to leave the next generation less divided, with greater social cohesion. May that be the legacy we leave as we transition from one generation to the next.



INTRODUCING OUR CONTRIBUTORS



From generation to generation

From nation to nation

Homes lost and found

Journeys taken, lives rebuilt

Step by step, moment by moment

Stories told, remembered and forgotten

From Zambia to Kwa-Zulu to Cape Town

St Helena to Athlone to Cardiff and back

Tokyo and Sydney to Macassar and Strand

Cameroon to Jo'burg to Cape Town and back

Latvia and Lithuania to the southern tip of Africa

South Africa to Paris and back

Lotus River to Robertson

Emasakeni to Nyanga

Scotland to the north and south of England

India to the Cape of Good Hope

The UK to Croatia and Russia and back

Jamaica to London

Russia to Dublin

The Cape to the UK to the US and back

Triumph and defeat

Joy and sorrow

Freedom and oppression

Love and hate

Prejudice and acceptance

Stories hidden, stories understood

Experiences shared, knowledge transferred

Learning, transforming

From generation to generation

Passing through, passing by, passing on

This publication includes contributions from eight men and five women from very diverse backgrounds and experiences. Some have chosen to also include stories from, or interviews with, others in their organisation, family or project. As coordinator of this book project, I invited each of these men and women to participate. Huge thanks and appreciation to all who have freely given of their time, and especially their stories, in support of this publication.

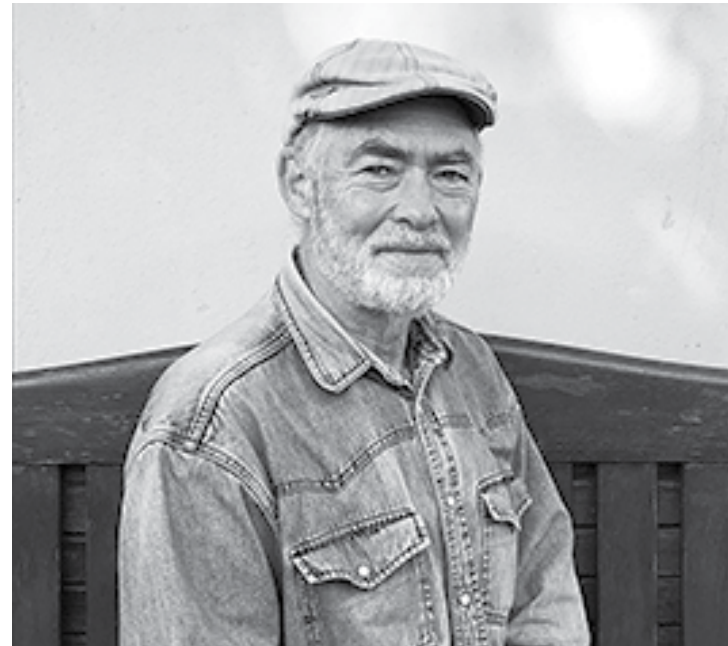
It is my pleasure now to introduce them to you, the reader, and to give them a chance to introduce themselves. I asked each contributor to describe their background and to acknowledge one special person in their lives.

Starting with myself...



Introducing Nic Fine

A lifetime of work and family experience connects me to the theme of this book. Each contributor to this project has crossed my path at some point and all, in various ways, have influenced and enhanced my understanding of what is possible to achieve through mentoring, supporting, and guiding others. For over 40 years I have worked in youth development and community support programmes that have promoted mentoring. I have helped to develop training resources that have been published in the United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Canada, Russia, South Africa and Croatia. I co-founded Hearts of Men in 2001 and have supported an ongoing schools-based mentoring programme over the past 20 years. I live in Cape Town with my life partner and am the proud dad to two sons.



Nic Fine



Grandfather Gershon Fine



Grandmother Ella Fine, and her daughter Lucy

Nic in his own words

I come from a mixed heritage, with generations before me having had to relocate from one country to another and seek a future. I was born in Cape Town on 14 February 1953. My parents, Azriel and Moyra, were also born in Cape Town in the early 1920s. My father's parents, Gershon and Ella, had immigrated to South Africa from what was then known as the 'Russian borders' – a triangle of land that bordered Russia, Latvia, and Lithuania. My mother's grandparents, my great-grandparents Louis and Becky, had immigrated to South Africa from Russia and Ireland, respectively. Theirs was an arranged marriage, caused by the shortage of Jewish men in Ireland and Louis's family's eagerness to get their son out of Russia at the time.



I left South Africa in 1980 never knowing if I would return. I met my wife Rebecca during an extended stay in the UK, where our two sons Dylan and Jacob were born. When Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected President in 1994, it opened up the possibility for my return home. As a family, we settled back in Cape Town in 1997.

Apart from both my parents, I would like to especially acknowledge my late friend and mentor, Arthur Benjamin. Arthur was an extraordinary human being, quietly going about his business with great integrity, generosity, and kindness to others. Even when struggling with tough health problems or family or financial issues, he would truly welcome each day as a gift filled with wonder. Indeed, his most often used expression was 'wonderful'. He saw the best in everyone and made a real difference in the lives of so many young people. He never complained or held any resentments, and I never heard him utter an unkind word about another person. Arthur was a shining example to me of how to live a good life. His friendship and gentle guidance made a difference in my life, and I would like to thank him for that.



Arthur Benjamin



Great-grandfather Azriel Fine



Nic's parents, Azriel and Moyra Fine on their engagement



*Four generations of women:
Nic's sister Andrea, mother Moyra, great-grandmother Becky,
and grandmother Ray, with great-grandfather Louis*



Introducing Fairoza Brey

I first met Fairoza when she was employed as a social worker with NICRO (South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and Reintegration of Offenders) in 1995 and I was facilitating staff training for them in the Western Cape. A few years later we were reacquainted when I led a development programme for NICRO. Our paths have continued to cross. Fairoza was invited to run parenting programmes within HOM, and later served as a member of the HOM Management Board. Years ago, Fairoza stepped up into the role of chairperson in HOM. She chairs the quality assurance team for community-based programmes within the Department of Social Development in the Western Cape Government, and is currently completing her doctorate, focused on blended families.

Alongside all her professional responsibilities, I have observed Fairoza as a compassionate mother, supportive of her extended family, and always active in her community. Over the years, I have witnessed her as a valued teacher of and trusted mentor to countless students. I have always valued her judgement and keen insight into human behaviour, as well as her ongoing commitment to making a difference in other people's lives. I greatly appreciate Fairoza's input in supporting the development of this book, from inception to completion. In whatever she undertakes, Fairoza lives her life as a shining example, best summed up in the credo 'never give up'.

Fairoza in her own words

My paternal and maternal grandparents were born in India and Cape Town, so my heritage is both Cape Malay and Indian. I was told that my great-great-great grandad, Philip Ratcliffe (1800–1868), son of Lord Philip Ratcliffe, accepted the Islamic religion and was then named Philip Gozyn Ryklief when he married my great-great-great grandmother. So, I am a descendent of a mixed racial group.

I was born in Rylands, a suburb near the Cape Flats, the oldest grandchild of the late Abdul Kader and his second wife, Latiefa Brey. My granddad passed on in the holy city of Mecca while he was on pilgrimage. My grandmother was his second wife. My dad, Allie Brey, was the oldest son. My mom, Aisha, was the third eldest daughter of Ebrahim Hoosain and Kulsum Harneker. Both families owned a variety



Fairoza's parents, Allie and Aisha Brey

of small businesses over the years. Hence, I literally grew up in shops, where I assisted my grandparents and parents from the age of ten, working weekends with my three siblings and cousins. My first formal employment was with NICRO, where I worked for 12 years; subsequently, I was employed as a clinical supervisor in the Department of Social Work, then as a lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University of the Western Cape.

I would like to acknowledge my dear maternal grandmom, the late Kulsum Harnaker, who was married to the late Ebrahim Hoosain Harnaker. My family remains greatly inspired by my grandmom who was an excellent businesswoman and a natural community worker, with a friendly, jovial, caring, and generous personality. She was mother to 8 children, and grandmother to 34 grandchildren (followed by 36 great-grandchildren and 24 great-great-grandchildren) and was a good family mediator. I fondly remember her home to be buzzing with family and friends, as she was an amazing cook who loved to entertain and feed extended family members and anyone who appeared on her doorstep. Grandmom often cooked huge pots of food for family functions, catering for hundreds. This tradition is continued by my mom, until this day. She loved the outdoors, going for long drives (her nickname was 'road inspector') and had friends from all over South Africa. Grandmom sadly passed on in September 1990 in a motor vehicle accident. She intended to visit an old family friend in Lydenburg, Mpumalanga, who was allegedly on his deathbed; ironically he survived my Grandmom by many years. May her dear soul rest in peace.



Fairoza Brey



*Grandfather Ebrahim
Hoosain Harnekar*



Fairoza at her graduation with her mom, Aisha Brey



*Step-grandmother
Aziza Brey*



*Grandmother
Latiefa Brey*



*Grandmother
Kulsum Harnekar*



Introducing Richard Kloosman

I first met Richard when he was an adult volunteer and mentor in one of the HOM community programmes. Richard's attention to detail and calm demeanour always stood out. When HOM opened its first headquarters in the Strand, Richard became programme coordinator and then administrator. More recently, Richard assisted in the massive task of publishing all HOM's training manuals. He is passionate about mentoring and personal development for men, and currently facilitates group work programmes within Western Cape prisons. Alongside the rest of his work, Richard runs his own karate school and takes great pride in the development and success of each student. Richard is also the proud dad to three sons and is very committed to his role as a father. I so admire the way he lives his life – his humility, calmness, integrity, and ongoing commitment. It has been a pleasure to work with him on this project.



*Richard's father, Kenneth Kloosman
with his grandson, Joshua*

Richard in his own words

I was born on 27 February 1972 in the Helderberg area of the Western Cape, one of the most beautiful places in the world. I have lived here for 49 years. My father, Kenneth, hails from the old District Six community in Cape Town. He was relocated to Paarden Eiland, where he grew up. My mother comes from a *dorp* (small town), Richmond, in the Klein Karoo in the Northern Cape. I grew up in Macassar, where I went to Oklahoma Street Primary School and Macassar Senior Secondary School. I did not finish my Technicon studies and went into a career in the hearing aid industry. It was during my school years that I met my wife-to-be and we got married in 1994.



Richard's mother, Berendina Kloosman, at 60

I grew up during times of social and political unrest and big changes in South Africa. I watched on television when Nelson Mandela was released from prison in 1990 and was present at the Grand Parade when political leaders spoke to a large crowd, before our first democratic elections. I was not an activist because I had not yet found my passion. But after two separate but equally significant events in my life – leaving my job to work with Hearts of Men, and getting involved in the prison ministry of our church – my passion to develop people was ignited and will remain with me until I die.

Many people have made meaningful contributions to my life – especially my wife, Lisle – but I would like to acknowledge my mother, Berendina, for being my constant companion. If I think back on any meaningful event, my mom was there right beside me. Mom was the one who taught me to pray, helped me with maths, gave me guidance, became uneasy when I started to notice girls; the list goes on. Not all have had the blessing of a mother – now for 49 years – asking, ‘Are you well?’ and constantly praying for you.

Mom could only attend school to Standard 8 (Grade 10) due to government regulations. As a young girl, she was a tomboy and very athletic. She met my father while working at a hotel in Robertson and they got married. She worked for her family before she got married, and after that her children became her life. I was her firstborn, but she saw my father’s children from a previous marriage as her own, so I never thought of them as my stepbrother and stepsisters. Mom loves the church and the Bible, and if I think about what she loves and what she is like, then I can see myself, because I am like her.



Richard Kloosman



Richard with his mom



Introducing Hilaire Ossang Akollo

I first met Hilaire when he was administrating the work of an organisation that provided training and employment for former combatants. I facilitated a course for them, and through this experience got to know this friendly man better. And there began a lifelong friendship. Later, while studying for his MBA, Hilaire joined many of our HOM school programmes as a volunteer facilitator. I loved his infectious enthusiasm for the work and his willingness to undertake any task. While employed elsewhere, Hilaire provided ongoing staff development training for HOM. He then joined the HOM Board and has been managing our finances for many years, alongside running his own business.

Over time, I have witnessed the devotion Hilaire has for his son in Johannesburg, constantly keeping in touch and seeing him whenever possible. This man has faced so many tough personal challenges, and I am always amazed at his ability to stay positive and enthusiastic about life. It has been a great pleasure knowing Hilaire and having him contribute to the work of HOM over many years.

Hilaire in his own words

I was born in Cameroon to loving parents who showered my siblings and me with care and attention. However, although their respective villages are located not far apart in the same province, my parents spoke different dialects. This turned out to be the perfect weapon my father's family would use to cause ceaseless friction and eventually resulted in my parents' separation. My mother, Ambomo Marguerite, spoke to us only in Eton, her dialect, and my father, a teacher, only



Hilaire Ossang Akollo



in French. As a result, we failed to learn Yambassa, my father's dialect, and were ostracised by his family who regarded us as strangers. They pressurised my father to take another wife from his county, a wife who would give him 'real' children who would speak like them. My father finally capitulated, although he refused to divorce my mother. He reluctantly took another wife, thus destroying our well-knit family and attracting all sorts of discord. Growing up under such stressful circumstances, I learnt to respect human beings, regardless of their race, creed and origin, and to celebrate life without discrimination and judgement, for these are vain things that breed of all kinds of societal ills.

I was blessed to have dedicated people and mentors in my life, whether within my family or away from home. I would like, however, to honour my father, Ossang Marcel Lebon, who was a cornerstone of my growth. He succumbed to peer pressure from his family, but he was a mere human, too. I will

treasure forever the father-son outings he initiated, during which he would transfer a wealth of advice and insights, a practice that I found very helpful, and which I repeated with my own son. I cannot recount all that I learnt from my father during our special times together, but I know that I am a lover of truth, honesty, resilience and positivity, thanks to him. A soft-spoken man, my father also taught me that it is unnecessary to shout at people in anger because that is the least effective way to get a message across.

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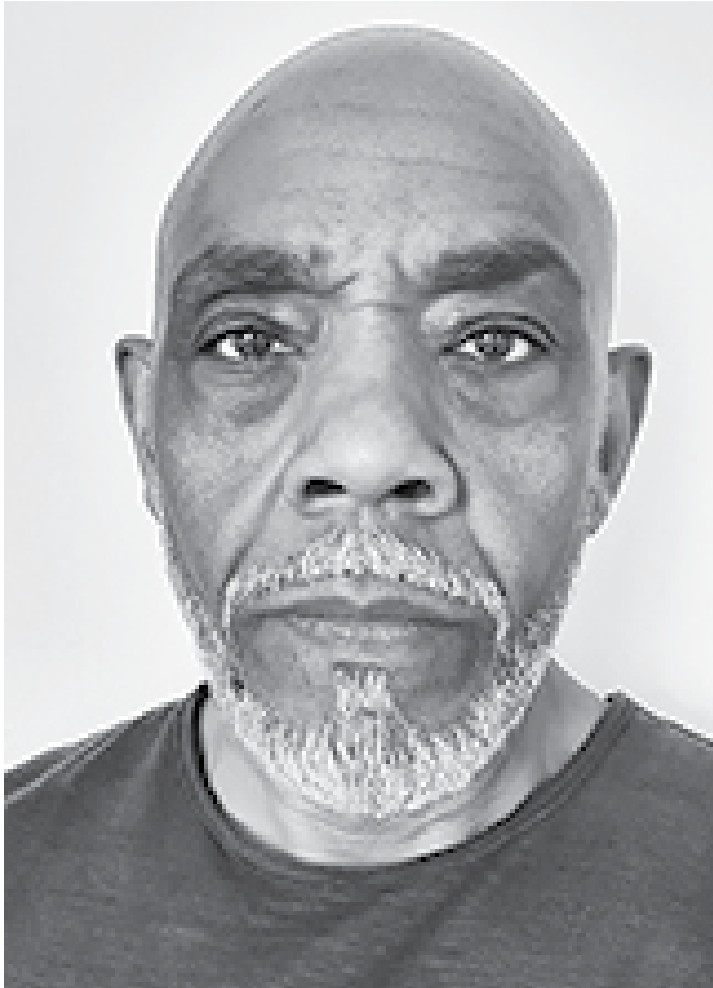


Hilaire



Hilaire with Solly Marlow at a Hearts of Men graduation ceremony





René Manradge

Introducing René Manradge

I first met René about 30 years ago when I was living in London, facilitating a training project for community volunteers who wanted to gain experience in youth work. After the initial training, the volunteers were each placed in a youth centre to practise their skills. René was a volunteer on that programme. Later, he did a trainer's course with us, served an apprenticeship, and eventually joined the facilitation team as a trainer. We worked together for many years, leading a programme for young offenders on remand in a large institution. Today, René is one of the senior trainers and mentors to young facilitators in that same organisation. When I first met René, he was working as a builder, painter, and decorator. Apart from his ongoing development as a trainer and mentor to the next generation of facilitators, I have admired René's progression as a visual artist. He is certainly a man of many talents.

One of my favourite photographs is of René embracing my baby boy shortly after his birth. He gifted my son a homemade wooden toy that we have kept to this day. Over the years I witnessed a transformation in René, from being a distant father to several children dispersed around London, to one who started to play a significant role in each of their lives. I also experienced René settling into a committed relationship and raising a new family.

What started as a working relationship has developed into a treasured friendship, even though now at a distance. We have come a long way together and I still feel connected to this man. I always love being in his presence and sharing our up and downs. I feel blessed to have him in my life and very pleased that he has contributed to our book.

René in his own words

My parents were from Jamaica, the descendants of slaves and plantation workers. Apart from our African heritage, it is obvious from our complexions and features that my family is a patchwork of different ethnicities: Indian Asian, Chinese Asian, and white. My mother, Idina Belzina Brown, came to England in 1953. She was married to Joe Brown and they had four children, but he suddenly took ill and died. From what I have learnt, his death was a hard blow as the marriage was a good one.

Britain's post-war invitation to Commonwealth countries to come to England and help rebuild it was a strong incentive to start a new life. A younger sister and others she knew had already migrated and were doing okay, and my mother decided to follow them, leaving her children in the care of her mother and extended family. Not long after arriving, she met my father, Alfred Johnson, who was already in a relationship. I was born on 12 December 1956, a product of that affair. I saw my father only occasionally in my early years and even less in my adult years. It seemed my mother would never settle anywhere and we moved from one rented accommodation to another. By the time I was 21, we had lived in nine different places in London. The last four of those were in Finsbury Park, North London, where I would buy my first property and call it home.

Growing up, I had many role models who were not positive – some telling me to work hard at school and not be like them, and others telling me I was smart and talented. I was 31 when I met Nic Fine and thought to myself that he was what a man should be like. He was in a committed relationship, something I had never seen. He was open and honest and had integrity, a quality that I was just beginning

to understand. I met Nic in a professional capacity, and I watched him challenge me and others to question our lives and make positive choices. I saw in him something I wanted for myself; I watched how he worked with young people and I thought, that's what I want to do, to make a difference in the lives of others. Nic gave me my career, he became my mentor, and in time a friend – and we've been friends for 33 years. I will be eternally thankful that he came into my life; his influence has been extensive. Nic now lives in Cape Town with his family and we get together whenever he visits.



Nic Fine, Jo Broadwood and René Manradge working at a London custodial institute for young men





Roy Davids

Introducing Roy Davids

I first met Roy as a parent at the school that our sons attended. At the time he was an educator at a high school in Cape Town. Some of us parents had started an annual boys' programme for 15-to-16-year old students at the school, and Roy volunteered as a facilitator. Roy and I first met at a team training weekend, and the more I got to know Roy, the more I appreciated the rich experience he brought to the process. I also appreciated the passion he brought to his work and the joy he showed when engaging with young men, whether in the classroom or up in the mountains. Roy has maintained close relationships with many young men, some of whom were without active fathers in their lives. Both his own sons went through the programme. On each occasion, Roy had to step out of his facilitator/teacher role, and step into being a father; stand in front of his sons in the 'Father and Sons Ceremony' and deliver a blessing, simply as a dad.

Roy later joined the high school staff at the school our sons attended. As a staff member, he took on the liaison and support role in the programme. It is wonderful to have Roy supporting this school community programme that has survived for 20 years. With his deep understanding of and passion for this work, I feel our children and our future are in steady hands.



Roy in his own words

My roots are very much in Cape Town. My parents and grandparents on both sides lived here all their lives. My parents, Ursula and Walter, were born in the late 1930s. My dad passed on six years ago, and my mom lives in a retirement complex. Her parents, Irene and Tommy Heuwel, had five children and struggled to make ends meet as Tommy was blind and worked in a specialist facility for people with disabilities. My father's parents, Elizabeth (Baby) and Martin Davids, also had five children, but one of them died in a bicycle accident at the age of 17. They eked out an existence by washing people's clothes and driving a truck for an ice cream company. I met my wife, Karen, on a Scripture Union camp for teenagers at which we were leaders. Karen is also a teacher but runs her own business, teaching positive discipline skills. We have two sons and two cats, and still live happily in Cape Town.

So many influences have shaped my life but if I had to choose one then Daryl Henning springs to mind. He worked for Scripture Union when I started volunteering as a leader at camps, and he was an integral part of my life when I started my teaching career. I met Daryl when I needed an older mentor and was starting to 'break away' from my parents. He took me under his wing and became the person I could talk to about anything. Daryl embraced all the ups and downs of daily existence. Many of the lessons that he passed on have become an integral part of what I carry into my teaching and the way I deal with children and people every day. Our method was to model what we taught teenagers and he taught that method through how he conducted his own life. He had flaws, but readily admitted to them. Daryl was a mentor, a friend, and a teacher.



Daryl Henning

Many of the lessons that he passed on have become a part of what I carry into my teaching and the way I deal with children and people every day.





Fiona Macbeth

Introducing Fiona Macbeth

Fiona (Fi) and I spent many years as colleagues in London working for an inspiring organisation, Leap Confronting Conflict (Leap CC). In the 1980s, Leap CC pioneered training courses and developed resources for conflict resolution and mediation, working with young people at risk and supporting youth work professionals. We were privileged to be part of the Leap CC team leading these developments in the British Youth Service. Fiona contributed hugely to the international success of the published training resources.

Fi and I worked very closely together, facilitating and writing as a team, running courses throughout the UK, and undertaking a research trip to the USA. I was lucky to work alongside such a warm and wonderful colleague who made work seem an extension of home.

Fi eventually left London to settle with her husband and children in the south of England. She is the proud mother of three daughters. She has spent the last decade teaching applied drama at the University of Exeter, and through her work has mentored countless students and several young people on community projects. Recently, she set up her own training programme, Inside Story, in which she takes participants through a personal storytelling and interpretive process.

I have always regarded Fi as a sister and was delighted when she asked me to be the godfather to her second daughter. Fi and I and our families have remained in touch over the years and see one another whenever possible. It is wonderful to have her contribution to this publication.

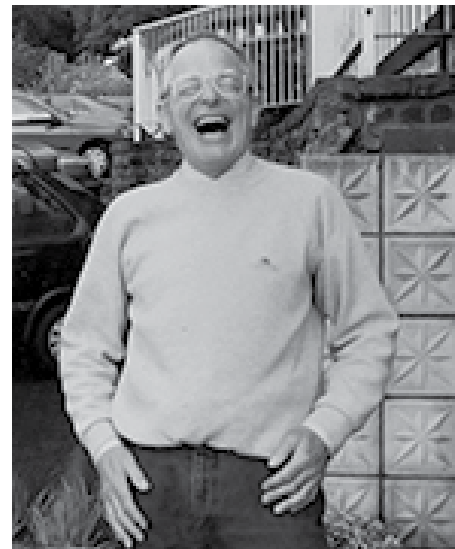
Fiona in her own words

I have lived in the south-west of England in the coastal county of Devon for 28 years, but I grew up in various places in England. My paternal grandfather, Donald Macbeth, was originally from Argyll – hence the Scottish name – but many generations ago his family moved to England, where they worked in the textile trade. My mother, Edwina Macbeth (née Ashworth), is English, with some Welsh and French heritage. When I was a child, my father, Andrew Macbeth, had to move around with his job. My family moved with him and my early childhood was spent in Malaysia. Donald Macbeth never had a birth certificate or passport and, while the official explanation is that it was destroyed in a fire, the story I favour is that he was adopted from a travelling family. It connects me to a sense of ancestors who spent many evenings storytelling around a shared campfire.

When I think about the people who have influenced and affected my life, I feel huge gratitude for the guidance and support I have received from many – some know the role they have played and some do not. One person who has unknowingly been a guide to me is my friend Emma Brown. She lives her life with an extraordinary clarity of intention and self-compassion, which allows her to be a vibrant and compassionate resource for others, whatever life challenges she is facing. I love what Brené Brown writes in her book *Rising Strong*, when she describes compassionate people as those who ask for what they need, say ‘no’ when they need to, and mean it when they say ‘yes’; they keep boundaries that prevent them from becoming resentful. My friend Emma is like this; she meets herself and the world with true compassion and I am wholeheartedly grateful for her inspiration.



Fiona's mother, Edwina Macbeth



Fiona's father, Andrew Macbeth



Introducing Brendyn Alloys

I first became acquainted with Brendyn when he was a teenager on the streets, having dropped out of school. As he describes in his story, the brother of one of our programme leaders convinced his former school principal to give this 'troublemaker' a second chance.

Brendyn participated in the Hearts of Men (HOM) programme at the school, matriculated successfully, and went on to study at university, also volunteering with HOM. He did an internship and eventually joined the HOM team as a young facilitator in training. I have experienced Brendyn giving back to children and young people all that he himself received over the years from elders and mentors who supported and influenced him at critical moments. The interventions of these key individuals, combined with Brendyn's fortitude and determination to seize opportunities, have supported him in becoming a man who can be counted on to make a significant contribution.

Now a father to two sons, Brendyn pursued his career in child-care and youth development, gaining wide experience. He has always shown a commitment to ongoing study and personal development. Currently he works at a residential facility for young offenders and has also set up a non-profit organisation, Amakhaya, which serves children and youth in his own community. Amakhaya provides feeding schemes as well as education and training to develop awareness of gender-based violence. As his mentor and supporter, I have been impressed by his strong commitment to community service, creativity in working out innovative solutions, and sharp inquiring mind.

One of my early memories of Brendyn is from an intensive wilderness programme many years ago. The two of us were



Brendyn Alloys

walking back to base camp and Brendyn asked, 'Nic, will you please tell me how you came to do this work. What was your journey? How did you begin?' I was immediately struck by the depth of this question. Indeed, most young men would not ask such a question of their elders, either through shyness or a lack of interest. I already knew that this young man would go far: he was willing to learn from others, bold enough to go out into the world, and prepared to ask what he wanted to know. And he has not disappointed! Now an adult in his thirties, Brendyn continues to impress.



Brendyn in his own words

The generations of men in my family before me relocated from KwaZulu-Natal to Montagu in the Western Cape in search of a better life and opportunities. My great-grandparents, Samuel Louis and Gertrude Alloys, got married in 1934 and settled in the Strand, about 40 kilometres outside of Cape Town. I was born in the Strand on 23 August 1984. My parents never married, and my father left us and never returned. My grandparents, Louis and Edna Sarah-Ann Alloys, both born in the Strand, raised me from a tender age. They had seven children: four sons and three daughters. My grandparents built a good life and are well-respected members of the Strand community. They celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary on 21 January 2021.

Growing up without the love and care of my biological father, I had to rely on the guidance and support from other good men. A few positive role models helped to mould and shape my character from a young age. The person I would like to acknowledge here is Nic Fine, whom I met soon after I joined Hearts of Men in 2003. I can confidently say that through his words, actions and kind gestures, Nic made a profound impact on my life during my time at HOM, and the mentoring relationship has continued. He has been a gentle voice of encouragement and part of my support system in difficult times for more than a decade.

Nic is an incredibly gifted and skilled facilitator. I remember vividly, one day he talked about respect for other human beings and his exact words were, 'You have to respect other people. Even if you think a person does not deserve to be respected, or if a person does not have respect for themselves, you still have to show and treat them with respect.' I think that really altered the way I saw people. It gave me a belief that

all human beings should be respected, irrespective of their lifestyle choices or the mistakes they made.

Nic's support and mentoring gave me an unmatched resilience and ability to thrive in the face of adversity. It helped me to become a loving, caring and involved young father to Caleb and Paul, and a social service professional who has a huge commitment towards serving the poorest and most needy and vulnerable people in my community.



Brendyn's grandparents, Louis and Edna Sarah-Ann Alloys



Guidance and mentorship over a lifetime are a tangled web. The threads from my parents and teachers, role models, my husband, children and friends are all interwoven and reinforce and redirect each other.



Introducing Jennie Reznek

About ten minutes' drive from where I live, Magnet Theatre stands on the grounds of the old Lion Match factory in Observatory. Every second year, Magnet Theatre accepts twenty students (ten female, ten male) into their two-year, full-time theatre training programme. It provides unique training for talented young performers and an access point into the theatre, film, and television industries. Due to their disadvantaged backgrounds and under-resourced education, most of these students would never gain access to the university theatre schools. Magnet Theatre provides top-level training and mentoring, and most of their graduates find employment within the arts, through successful auditions or by creating their own work and setting up their own companies. I have witnessed several cohorts over the years and the wonderful talent as well as Magnet Theatre's commitment to mentoring and providing a safe space – another home – for these young people living in challenging circumstances has always impressed me. I have had the privilege on two occasions to engage directly with Magnet Theatre participants as a facilitator on a project, and in a workshop focusing on gender roles and experiences.

Jennie, a gifted performance artist and writer, is one of the founding members of Magnet Theatre and is currently its artistic director. She leads Magnet Theatre with unbelievable passion, love and joy. Jennie has contributed a piece for our book that includes the voices of many of her co-leaders, teachers, and young people. We are proud to include Magnet Theatre as an inspiring example of mentorship at its best.



Jennie in her own words

I am a second generation South African. My grandparents on my mother's side came from Birmingham in the UK and settled in the bustling diamond town of Kimberley. They were jewellers and opened a store there. My grandparents on my father's side came from Czechoslovakia and settled in Koffiefontien. In the next generation, the journey was reversed. My brother left to study in the UK and settled finally in Toronto, Canada, and my sister has lived in London for the past 40 years. But my parents and I stayed. My father served in the Second World War as a medic in North Africa and Italy, and was awarded the Military Cross for his bravery in the field in 1944. He practised as a GP in Pietermaritzburg, my hometown, until just before he died at 88. After attending university in Cape Town, I left to study in France but came back in the 'struggle years' to start Magnet Theatre with my husband, Mark Fleishman. We have two children – a daughter who is studying fine art here in Cape Town, and a son who has gone to study history in Cambridge.

Guidance and mentorship over a lifetime are a tangled web. The threads from my parents and teachers, role models, my husband, children, and friends are all interwoven and reinforce and redirect each other. I write in the chapter about the significance of Jacques Lecoq and his impact on how I *create* in my life. But I choose here to write about my father and the impact he has had on how I *live* my life. My father, Joel Robert Reznick, was a man who was meant to live forever. His light shone very brightly when he was alive. He was a good man. He was a kind man. He was a creative man. He was a fighter. He made friends wherever he went and talked

to everyone. He was curious about everything. And generous. He never made me feel, as a woman, that I was less than any man. His dignity lay in his work, and every day he tried in his medical practice and with all his patients to make the world a better place. So, I think about his vibrancy and how he lived his life, and I am guided in his absence to try and do the same: to make sure that I use my time on this earth to contribute in whatever small way I can to making it a better place.



Jennie Reznick



Through his work, Mteto has guided and mentored many young people in their artistic, dramatic and writing endeavours.

Introducing Mteto Mzongwana

Mteto, a father, poet, and writer has crossed my path several times. Years ago, Mteto worked alongside my mother at The Space Theatre in Cape Town. He has shared many stories with me about his interactions with my sister and mother who were involved in working in and supporting community arts development programmes.

Mteto has been a stalwart in supporting and running the Nyanga Arts Centre in the most difficult of circumstances. A couple of years back, he invited me on several occasions to visit the Centre, to guide them in promoting leadership and working with young artists from the surrounding community. I will always remember the dramatic scene that greeted me when I arrived for my first visit. I had just parked alongside the Centre when I heard loud voices nearby. A large group of young men were running across an empty piece of ground opposite the Centre and shouting excitedly. They were all carrying packages and boxes of various sizes. I heard police sirens in the distance and the group disappeared quickly down side streets and between houses.

Mteto explained that these young men must have just raided a supply truck that had entered Nyanga. He said that they would wait for a truck to enter and then ambush it, operating quickly and dispersing before law-and-order officers arrived. Typically, these young men would be unemployed and this was a way to put food on the table. Mteto has often been a victim of crime himself, with regular and continual burglaries at his house near the Arts Centre.

Through his work, Mteto has guided and mentored many young people in their artistic, dramatic, and writing endeavours. I admire Mteto's resilience, his ability to keep going in tough and challenging circumstances within his family and community, and his ongoing commitment to improving the lives of those around him.





Mteto Mzongwana

Mteto in his own words

I come from the Abathembu Nation in the house of Mthirara; my clan name is Madiba, my mother is from the AmaBaca Nation, her clan name is Mambathane. I was born in Sakkiesdorp, Nyanga, on 21 January 1957. My father's name is Ruben Thami Sangxalo and my mother's name is Sisana Susan Mzongwana. Both my parents were born in the 1920s in the former Transkei, a 'homeland' under apartheid.

My grandfather and grandmother from my mother's side were Bende Mathetha Mzongwana, born in Gatyana-Willowvale, and Nosilamsi Amelia Mzongwana, born in

Kwathamsane Village in Mqanduli. My grandfather and grandmother from my father's side were Sibambano Sangxalo and Mabhayi Sangxalo; they were also born in the former Transkei in Qamata, near Cofimvaba.

Sibambano Sangxalo and Mabhayi Sangxalo came to the Cape in the late 1940s, first to Touws River to work on the farms, then they relocated to Retreat on the Cape Flats. Afterwards, they were forcefully removed to Nyanga West, now Gugulethu. My grandfather Bende Mathetha Mzongwana, came to work in Cape Town and lived in a hostel in Langa. He then brought my mother to attend school in Cape Town, at Langa High, while my grandmother remained behind in the Transkei.

I am indebted to many people who have mentored and coached me to be the person I am today. But my special acknowledgement goes to George Makhanya, a calm, elegant and down-to-earth gentleman, who gave his time to nurture his community and serve on many football associations with integrity and generosity. He was a person who, when there were stormy arguments, could bring peace and understanding with his quiet and assertive reasoning. Today I emulate his teachings of respect, discipline, and *ubuntu* by giving my time to the arts and my community and family. This has made a difference in all aspects of my life.



Introducing Steve McCreadie

When I was working for Leap CC in London, we identified the need to develop a pool of trainers to enable the organisation to expand and diversify. We targeted people with experience who were already engaged in community, arts and social work, and we held a Trainers for Trainers course to meet and introduce our work to prospective team members. What an experience it turned out to be; introducing us to talented, inspiring individuals who went on to make a huge difference to the work of Leap CC. Several of them have subsequently created innovative and ground-breaking programmes throughout the UK.

One of these individuals was Steve McCreadie from Scotland. Steve began facilitating with Leap CC, and on two occasions invited us to Scotland to work with staff teams there. Over the years Steve has worked for large youth development charities, progressing from team and project leading to senior management positions. More recently, he has set up and leads an exciting independent initiative, The Lens, which promotes 'intrepeneurship' – unleashing the potential of staff within the local government and NGO sectors to create innovative projects that make a real difference to their departments and organisations. The work he and his colleagues are doing is inspirational.

Steve and I have been good friends since those early days. I was best man at his wedding (I wasn't allowed to wear a kilt!), and he at mine (he came in a kilt). He is the proud dad to a daughter and a son, and lives with his life partner in Dumfries. He is also a serious wilderness explorer, climbing in the Scottish Highlands and kayaking along the Scottish coast.

What a delight it is to have Steve's contribution.

Steve in his own words

I was born in 1962 and grew up in a seaside town called Saltcoats in Scotland. My dad (also Steve) worked itinerant jobs, making a living where he could. Regularly moving from one job to another, he was sociable and restless. My mum, Kathleen, stayed at home, nurturing and raising my brother, Eamon, and me. Her sudden death when I was 12 remains a defining moment in my life.

My dad's parents were proud and dignified. My grandmother's family were local fishermen, with a thriving business in the early 1900s. My grandfather, a captain in the merchant navy during the Second World War, was regularly away at sea while my dad was young. Grandfather's boat was sunk by U-boats on more than one occasion, and he lost his two brothers, also sea captains, during the war. My mum's parents were warm, funny, and full of love. My grandmother stayed home, fiercely loving her three daughters and four grandchildren. My grandfather worked at Armitage Shanks, manufacturers of bathroom fixtures that were exported around world. I left home when I was 17 years old. I wanted to forge a different path; yet, in time, I came to recognise the bravery, resilience, determination, service, love, and generosity that defined my ancestors. And, in doing so, I gained some understanding of my restless, insatiable drive to do justice to their memory.

Grace was my direct line manager for over six years, while I led services that supported people. She was well named; definitions of grace include 'smoothness and elegance of movement', 'courteous goodwill', 'bringing honour or credit to (someone or something) by one's attendance or participation'. It is incredibly difficult to name one mentor out of the many I have been fortunate to have. Yet, for





Steve McCreadie

her consistent ability to rise above her own concerns and struggles, to serve and create a space for others, Grace is the person I choose.

Grace stretched and tested me in ways no one else had. Always motivated by the needs of those we served, she brought a drive and passion to constantly improve. In her actions and words, she set an example that challenged and supported me in equal measure. I saw her set aside – with great discipline – her own concerns, ambitions and ego to hold a physical and emotional space to resolve the leadership challenges we regularly faced. Patiently waiting as my learning took place, she helped me develop leadership traits and qualities that would continue to guide me for many years. Grace was also great fun – humorous and irreverent – and I am deeply appreciative of the impact she had in my life.



THE LENS

Valuing Ideas.
Inspiring People.
Powering Innovation.





Elaine Maane

Introducing Elaine Maane

I first met Elaine through my brother, Derrick. He and Elaine were trustees of Openly Positive, an organisation that produced resources and supported initiatives for people and families living with HIV/Aids. In 2009, Elaine published her memoir, *Umzala – a Woman's Story of Living with HIV*. I was very moved by her story: struggling with the loss of her husband; being a single mother; dealing with her HIV status; and mentoring and supporting other women

facing similar challenges in their lives. I met with Elaine on several occasions, and I was always struck by her insight and compassion, and the way she engaged with challenging issues.

When I was approached by Magnet Theatre a few years ago to facilitate a process looking at gender issues and dynamics, I needed a female facilitator to partner me, as we would work with the male and female students separately for three days and then bring them together to engage in dialogue. The first woman who came to mind was Elaine. I was grateful she accepted the invitation and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience of planning, designing, and facilitating this process with her.

Within her story, Elaine includes an interview with her son, Skhumbuzo. This fine young man confirms my view that Elaine has done a wonderful job as a mother in single-handedly raising him. She works fulltime with STEPS, a non-profit organisation based in Cape Town. STEPS is passionate about the power of documentaries to disrupt, shift, and move the world around us. Diverse projects use film to empower, start a conversation, educate, and produce action around human rights and environmental issues, and give a voice to the marginalised and disadvantaged communities. Elaine conducts training workshops for facilitators in the use of film as a tool for engagement. She provides ongoing mentorship, capacity building, and support to a pool of young facilitators across eight African countries. I am so pleased that Elaine has agreed to be part of this publication.

Elaine in her own words

The knowledge I have of my family background I got from my uncle, who is my 'small father' in my tradition, as he is my biological dad's youngest brother and only sibling alive. My uncle narrated to me that my great-great-grandfather, Maane, was once abducted as a slave, and he gained his freedom after his master's death. I was told Maane was tall and of a strong build and that he married his late master's young wife by the name of Kabilani. From this man came my great-grandfather, Mikaelo, who fathered my grandfather, George, who married my grandmother, Maria, and fathered my father, Edwin, the eldest of three siblings. George and Maria came from neighbouring villages in the southern part of Zambia. According to my mother, Violet, she and my dad met during their schooldays, but later crossed paths, leading to their marriage in Lusaka, Zambia. My mother is also the eldest of three siblings.

In all honesty, looking back now, I feel strongly that my parents and the many women from both the paternal and maternal sides of my upbringing have played varied roles in shaping how I have viewed life and, to some extent, still do. If I must pinpoint one person out of them all, it would be my mother. I suppose now that I am not only a daughter, but also a mother and a mentor to others, it is fair to say that I still draw knowledge from my mother, whom we all affectionately call 'mama'; even her grandchildren call her this.

Also, I would like to acknowledge my son, Skhumbuzo. Without him, I would not be who I am today. My becoming a parent has allowed me to appreciate every lesson, pain, and tear that this life journey has given to me.



Elaine's son, Skhumbuzo Butler Dube

If I must pinpoint one person out of them all, it would be my mother. I suppose now that I am not only a daughter, but also a mother and a mentor to others, it is fair to say that I still draw knowledge from my mother.



Introducing Jo Broadwood

Jo was another participant on the Trainers for Trainers course that I mentioned in relation to Steve McCreadie. Jo had previously been working for Women in Theatre, a company of actors based in the north of England. At the time she was looking for other employment opportunities and she joined the Leap CC training team as a part-time facilitator.

Jo and I worked together over several years, designing and facilitating a leadership programme for young men in custody in a London detention facility. The work was extremely demanding and challenging, as we worked with young men accused of crimes ranging from shoplifting and housebreaking to murder. Jo and I also trained prison officers in the programme. Jo would very often be the only woman in the room, but she handled the situation with aplomb. I went on to facilitate many courses alongside her and have a high regard for her facilitation and group work skills, engaging personality, and ability to work towards solutions in tough situations.

Jo eventually progressed to managing and mentoring the Leap CC pool of facilitators. One of her greatest gifts was to bring clear evaluation and development processes to the organisation. Years ago, Jo spent a sabbatical staying with my family in Cape Town. During her stay, she volunteered time with Hearts of Men, introducing the organisation to staff appraisal structures, and developing a clear pathway for the ongoing growth and development of HOM facilitators.

Jo has extensive publishing, research, and community-building experience. Two training resource manuals we worked on together have been published in the UK. In 2012, she published *Arts and Kindness* through People United Publishing. Jo was director of the UK-based charity,

Streetdoctors, which mobilised, mentored and trained medical student volunteers to train youth on the streets to become first responders, teaching them techniques to save their friends' lives if they were victims of violence, or involved in stabbings or fights. She continues to contribute to and lead community-building initiatives within the UK.

I consider Jo a valued friend, and we are honoured to have her participate in our book.

Jo in her own words

My mother, Maude Mary Eileen, was born in Cornwall, the youngest of four. My grandfather, Thomas Henry Andrew, was a tenant farmer, stonemason and general handyman, scraping a living where he could in the depression between the two world wars. My grandmother, Winnifred, farmed alongside him, ran the public house, and played the organ at chapel. My grandfather was bipolar and had regular spells in the local asylum. In 1934, the day before my mother's sixth birthday, he took his own life. My grandmother sold the few animals they had and moved with her children to London. She married again and brought up seven children on a council estate in southeast London. Throughout my childhood, my grandmother was the matriarch of our large family. Undiminished by crippling arthritis, she was fierce and indomitable.

My mum and dad met in the Ritzy ballroom on the Strand just after the Second World War.

My dad, Donald Alfred, was the son of a gardener, George, and Flo, a maidservant. At 15 my dad lied about his age to join the Royal Navy and served in the Second World War in Burma (now Myanmar). After the war he joined the merchant navy and then the civil service. As a family we moved every two to three years, living on army bases in



Germany and then Cyprus, and returning to live permanently in Britain when I was 13. The war in Cyprus was starting as we were leaving, and we were one of the last civilian families to be evacuated. I remember watching the TV news back in Britain and seeing the roofs of the high-rise hotels in Famagusta that I had played on with my brothers, burning after the Turkish bombings.

I have led an eventful and varied life. As a young woman I was active in the anti-apartheid movement, the Troops Out Movement (which focused on the actions of the British Army in Northern Ireland), and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). I came out as a lesbian in the early eighties and was a musician and performer starting a theatre company, which is still going 40 years later. I now live in Hackney in east London with my partner, and run a charity that tackles division and polarisation and builds social peace.

I would like to acknowledge my dear friend Ros (Malaika Rose Stanley). I met Ros when I first moved to London in the early nineties. I moved in with her and her two sons, whom she was raising with the help of a wide circle of 'aunties', and we quickly became firm friends. Fostered as a mixed-race child into a white family in a white area of Birmingham in the sixties, Ros faced her share of racism and prejudice. She trained as a teacher and then in her late thirties decided to follow her dream of being a children's author. She made an important contribution to children's fiction at a time when there were few black female writers being published in Britain. Ros was forthright, funny and fierce. She always took the road less travelled (and much more interesting). Although her life held many challenges, she did not waste time on regret or self-pity. Her warmth, courage, and laughter meant that she lived a life full to the brim with adventures and love. Her life is a shining example to her sons who have grown into beautiful young men, to her beloved grandson, and to her wide circle of friends and family who adored and treasured her.



Jo Broadwood



Jo's friend, Ros Stanley



*Africans have a
responsibility to tell
their own stories on
their own terms.*

*‘Don’t wait for
someone else to tell
your story. You might
not like it.’*

THE POWER OF STORIES

Griots – a class of travelling poets, musicians and storytellers who maintain a tradition of oral history in parts of West Africa – originated in the kingdom of Mali around the 13th century. A griot's role has traditionally been to preserve the genealogies, historical narratives, and oral traditions of their people. They keep records of births, deaths, and marriages through the generations of the village or family. In a recent interview, one modern-day griot describes his work as 'I let you know who you are, and where you come from'.

Oral traditions make it possible for a society to pass on knowledge across generations without writing. They help people make sense of the world, and are used to teach children and adults about important aspects of their culture. Sometimes referred to as 'hereditary artisans of the spoken word', griots work with and through stories, legends, songs, jokes, riddles, proverbs and naming. Because this is not recorded in text, there is always a risk when a gap in the chain of transmission occurs, and vital stories and history can go missing. There is also a risk (as with modern day leaders and politicians) that the narrator can wilfully decide to conceal or hide important information.

There is a strong connection between the ancient griot tradition and some modern-day rappers in the ways in which they communicate messages and stories to their audiences. With modern recording techniques, many of the oral

stories and songs are now being preserved in audio digital platforms.

The message that writer Sangu Delle received from his mentor, the late Komla Afeke Dumor (a renowned journalist for BBC Africa), was that Africans have a responsibility to tell their own stories on their own terms. 'Don't wait for someone else to tell your story. You might not like it.'¹

The author Julian Barnes describes our recording of history as the point where the imperfection of our memory meets the inadequacy of our documentation. In his novel, *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes suggests that to fully understand the version that is being presented, we need to know the history of the historian or the storyteller. He subscribes to the notion that history isn't necessarily the 'lies of the victorious' or the 'delusions of the defeated', but rather 'the memories of the survivors', most of whom are neither victorious nor defeated.

Narrative storytelling is not to find the truth but rather to get the teller's construction of the meaning they give their acts and situation. And therein lies the power of stories.

Through a character in her novel, *Homeland*, Karin Brynard describes how every person possesses a wind: the wind is a person's story, the story is a person's wind, and the wind carries the stories to the people.

¹ *Making Futures – Young Entrepreneurs in a Dynamic Africa*
by Sangu Delle





STORYTELLING AND HIDDEN NARRATIVES

Fiona Macbeth

Listening to stories together is one of the oldest forms of both entertainment and education, and there is evidence that as long ago as Neolithic times, stories and songs were part of prehistoric life. Nowadays, as well as the anecdotes and stories that fill our conversations, stories are all around us in books, films, theatre, newspapers, and the digital world of social

media. Whether we are aware of it or not, we share the uniquely human ability to invent, dream, imagine, and make up stories. For thousands of years, we have been making sense of the inexplicable through story. Every culture has myths that provide a metaphorical landscape for the vastness of the human experience and remind us how to live with doubt and trust in the unknown.

Just as all cultures have their myths, so do all families have their

stories; tales of ancestral struggle and triumph, historical narratives of the people that came before and how they lived, and a set of family anecdotes drawn from shared experiences. Stories connect us to our families and to our ancestors, teaching us about where we came from. Stories help us learn how to navigate our human experience.

Stories connect us to our families and to our ancestors, teaching us about where we came from.

Intergenerational stories and transgenerational messages

The psychodramatist, Anne Schützenburger, makes a distinction between ‘intergenerational legacies’ (stories, guidance and influence that we know come from prior generations) and ‘transgenerational legacies’ (stories that are secret, forgotten, not resolved or communicated orally). Both intergenerational stories and transgenerational messages affect the lives of the receiving generation, but the hidden nature of transgenerational influence makes the shadow it casts particularly powerful. Whether we grew up in a family that actively told stories or not, we will receive messages about our family’s unique history and experience. These messages are unconsciously passed on in ways that research in epigenetics² is enabling us to begin to understand. Often, too, they are carried within a stock set of family anecdotes. I am intrigued by these anecdotal family stories and the different meanings they carry for each generation.

Stories my grandmother told

One of the greatest joys of my childhood was listening to my grandmother, Irene Ashworth (née Evans), telling stories. She was a wonderful storyteller of made-up stories, and as soon as she arrived in our home we would ask for stories ‘from her lips’. From her we learnt more about the elusive woodland creature, Mr Smith, who lived in the roots of large trees, wore a red bobble hat, and was only very rarely visible to humans. We could walk for hours as she regaled us with stories of Mr

2 Epigenetics research suggests trauma stays in our DNA. It can be passed from one generation to another. The trauma experienced by our forebears can determine what our DNA structure looks like. This can trigger negative reactions in us when we experience stress.



Smith's misadventures. She also told us about a giant, whom she named Richarché Mon Parké, whose body (she claimed) formed the rolling land of Richmond Park, a 17th century deer park on the edge of south-west London where she had grown up. I still remember the stories and feel gratitude for the early lesson in how to trust in imagination and the gift of uncomplicated, joyful communication. On some level, even as a child, I understood that making up stories was an expression of my grandmother's love for us. In that seemingly simple transaction – she spoke, we listened – a message was passed to me: sharing in a creative experience makes you feel valued and cared for. This message has been with me all my life and has influenced me to want to create those experiences for the young people I work with, as well as my own children.

However, the passing on of guidance, wisdom, and memory is not straightforward. Even the anecdotal family stories that recount an event can carry a message we are not necessarily aware of, either as the teller or the recipient. The words of a story are only one part of the communication; there is also an undercurrent that carries the secret or unspoken truths of the teller's experiences and their related self-beliefs. I think of this undercurrent as our hidden or personal narrative. Mostly we aren't aware of the way our hidden narrative influences us, and certainly we are mostly completely unaware of the power of the unconscious messages we give.

Rarely did my grandmother tell us stories about her childhood, but she didn't need to. My brothers and I understood enough from her made-up stories to guess at a childhood full of adventures and fun, with no boring adults around to keep her and her seven siblings in order. The true stories she told were about her daughters – my mother and her sister – and their childhood.

The day we ate the violin

My grandmother was a musician who carried her violin under her arm to every new home she and her two small daughters moved to during the early years of the war and afterwards. 'The day we ate the violin' was a story she and then my mother told. At the time of the story, the three of them were living in a caravan on a beach in the Gower Peninsula in Wales. The caravan was their home for six months. They lived on a beach! 'You were so lucky,' we would say to my mother. 'Yes, it was lovely,' she said, 'but there was no money, except sometimes some would arrive in the post.' My grandmother never knew when it would come or how much there would be. The year before, my grandfather, Edwin Ashworth, had gone to 'seek his fortune in Canada', with the promise he would send money back and would one day be settled enough for his wife and daughters to join him. The telegram inviting them to join him never came.

On one particular day, money was expected soon, but there was no knowing when it would arrive and they were all hungry. 'We'll go to Swansea and pawn the violin,' my grandmother told her daughters. 'It'll be fun!' They used the last of their coins to take the bus to town. My grandmother came out of the pawn shop jubilant, waving bank notes. 'We're rich! We'll go to the poshest hotel in town and we'll order a slap-up meal!' They sat in window seats and ate their fill, believing they were rich. As they travelled home on the bus my grandmother turned to her small daughters and said cheerfully, 'The money's all gone, so guess what, we just ate the violin!'

This story illustrates the elements of my grandmother's life that she most valued: extravagance in the face of poverty, a lack of attachment to material things (she needed her violin



but wouldn't let her children feel her loss), and a commitment to making life fun for her children. Told by my grandmother and then my mother, the story was one of many stories about my mother's unsettled upbringing during the war. All showed my grandmother's nonconformist behaviour. When my grandmother told the stories, I saw her playfulness as exciting, funny, engaging. She made me want to be there with her, with a grown-up who could do somersaults on an iron railing, who would give all the money in her purse to a stranger, who gave away things she valued so she couldn't lose them.

Unacknowledged personal narratives

When my mother tells me about the pawned violin, she can't hide the more troubling side of the story that she experienced as a child; the child who silently wonders 'What will happen now the money's all gone? Will we have to move again if the rent can't be paid? How am I going to make it okay for my mother and my sister?'

Despite the seeming fun of my mother's childhood, she was influenced deeply by the hidden narrative of her mother's family history, the emotional legacy of buried grief and loss. The facts of my grandmother's childhood were no secret. My grandmother's mother died in childbirth with her eighth child. My grandmother, just ten years old, was the eldest girl. 'Look after the babies,' her mother said to her before she died. My grandmother promised, and that's what she did.

Her father was still alive and took care of the material needs of the large family, but it was my ten-year-old grandmother who rocked the younger siblings and sang to them, who made up games and stories, who told them they were loved. That my grandmother became a proxy mother for her siblings was an openly known fact of her life. She never talked about the loss of her mother when she was still a child, or what it was like for her to take on a mothering role from the moment she became motherless herself.

When my grandmother had children of her own, they too experienced made-up games and endless stories, but underlying the playfulness was a powerful message communicated unconsciously to my mother: that she had to be the grown-up for this mother who had not had a mother of her

own. Unconsciously, my grandmother's pain was passed on to my mother, and she responded to the emotional legacy of loss and need. My – now elderly – mother tells me she always felt she had to take care of her mother, but that she had no awareness she was meeting my grandmother's longing for mothering until she herself reached old age.

Taking on a mothering role as a child was something my grandmother simply had to do, and she was clear it wasn't something she wanted her own children to experience. She spoke proudly of the way she had enabled her daughters to have a 'proper childhood'. Yet, despite her outward determination, despite the games and the fun she brought, what my mother responded

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to in her childhood was my grandmother's unspoken, unacknowledged 'personal narrative' of loss and unmet need. This hidden, emotional communication influenced her to prioritise her mother's need for care. She is not unusual in responding to an emotional legacy – we all do it to some extent. When we receive messages from a family narrative that is overt and known – such as the struggles of our family or community, the sacrifices that were made, the values that we are expected to uphold – we are able to make a choice about which messages to follow and how. When the narratives are hidden, secret or unspoken, for example because of trauma or shame, we still receive the messages, but on an unconscious, emotional level, and it is nearly impossible to resist them.

With daughters of my own reaching adulthood, I am beginning to understand how the unnamed, unspoken trauma of my grandmother's childhood was passed on to my mother and has also influenced me. The compulsion to care for my mother, even when I was a child, is just like the compulsion my own mother felt, yet neither she nor I knew we were responding to an ancestral legacy that does not belong to us. With support and guidance, it is possible to challenge inherited and hidden family narratives, and to change the internal, personal narratives we carry.

Stories my father told

My grandmother was not the only storyteller in my family. My father, Andrew Macbeth, was also a natural storyteller with a wonderful ability to find something funny in even the smallest of moments. The lightness and humour of my father's anecdotes made for easy listening. He shared his memories with a focus on the absurd and made the casual violence of his childhood into something palatable,

probably for his own emotional protection as well as ours.

The stories that my father told about being punished by teachers were favourites with my brothers and me. He told them with a grin and a laugh, and we laughed too at how he was beaten for running in the corridors or not getting to a lesson fast enough; for forgetting an item he should have packed for an overnight hike or for filling his backpack too full. Our father told them as hilarious stories about his inability to work out the rules. We loved the punchline: 'I never knew what I was going to get wrong that day!' Sadly, his stories are not unique; he grew up at a time when casual corporal punishment was common and there are many of his age who have their own stories of being caned at school.

My brothers and I enjoyed the picture he drew: children falling victim to the mysterious workings of the adult world. I felt he was telling us that there would be rules and behaviours we would not understand and that he remembered what it was like to feel that way. My father died ten years ago so I can't ask him now, but I wonder if he was aware of the reassuring quality of a story that told us he could still see things from the child's point of view. I can readily recall this sensation of being understood and am grateful for the way it has guided me to stand alongside young people and see things from their perspective; as guidance it is a wonderful gift.

However, as I have said, in any truth that is unresolved or not spoken about, there is the potential for an emotional legacy to be passed on. My father never spoke of his own confusion or the fear he must have felt knowing there was no way he could get things right and avoid punishment, but nor did he communicate helplessness. Instead, what he communicated was to be positive, never to complain, and not to make a fuss. He never said those words, but he didn't



need to; the message was clear. Again, he's not around for me to ask, but I wonder if he would want to see his childhood from a different perspective and name the confusion and the violence he experienced for what it was.

As a drama facilitator and educator, I have witnessed the power of hidden personal narratives and have seen how a destructive personal narrative can be turned around through retelling a story with a new meaning. It's not simple, but it is important that an older generation is aware of the power of the hidden personal narrative. We cannot change the past and undo our ancestors' painful experiences, but we can learn to separate what is our own from what belongs with our ancestors. We can learn how to listen to our own 'hidden narratives' and take responsibility for not passing them on to the next generation. And as teachers and mentors we can support young people to separate what is their own experience from what belongs with their ancestors.

Supporting young people to reshape their narratives

Working with young people who were in the process of leaving 'care' (children's homes or foster families), we devised performances drawn from their personal experiences, reshaped into a fictionalised version. The stories we devised went through a process that enabled the tellers to see and experience their stories from a different perspective, with a new underlying narrative.

We need support and guidance from people who can see the hidden stories, passed down, that influence us, and can show them to us for what they are – someone else's experiences and someone else's stories.

Casey was a member of the theatre group. She had been taken away from her birth family due to neglect and had lived much of her life being moved from one foster family to another. We were devising a movement piece based on a story one young person had told about trying to get attention in a large family. As the group worked on the piece, Casey became upset and removed herself. She said she didn't want to participate because 'I've always been invisible'. This was her valid, painful reality and even

though she was far from invisible within the group the power of that narrative pushed her to the edges of the group, where she could confirm her 'invisibility' to herself. She wasn't aware of what she was doing, but she was uncomfortable, both in the group and sitting at the edges. She didn't want to talk about what was happening to her, but her distress was obvious.

After a while, the discomfort of being outside the action was greater than the fear of joining in. As the group welcomed her back, the rules for devising the piece were changed to ensure that Casey would be central. The resulting short movement piece became a celebration of Casey's whispered words 'I like it when people see me'. The process of Casey changing her personal narrative from 'I'm invisible' to 'I like it when people see me' was never referred to verbally; the shift was made physically. With movement and with skilful, compassionate care from the group, Casey had rewritten a painful and damaging personal narrative that gave her access to a different way of experiencing herself.

As well as the intergenerational stories that tell of ancestral history and pass on valuable knowledge and experience, we need to tell the stories that show we can intervene in the passing on of messages that carry hidden trauma or shame. It is possible to do this if we have people who can offer us a different perspective. We need support and guidance from people who can see the hidden stories, passed down, that influence us, and can show them to us for what they are – someone else's experiences and someone else's stories.

Creating 'An Inside Story'

An Inside Story is a creative practice for addressing blocks and challenging issues in both personal and professional contexts. Human beings have great capacity to be flexible and adaptive, and have remarkable ability to find a way through even seemingly impossible situations, but at times we also feel stuck and making a change seems impossible. Being able to envisage things from a different perspective is something we can all do, but when we're stuck, tired or distressed it's hard to imagine alternatives.

I created An Inside Story³ to harness the imagination in the exploration of personal experience, using storytelling techniques and character illustrations to unlock stuck doors and surprise us with new insights and questions. The individual sessions take place online, but because the focus is on the territory of story and imaginative places, the experience exists way beyond the screen and creates the feeling of travelling elsewhere. Bringing imagination to exploration of personal experience creates freedom to make new discoveries and with this sense of freedom we can come to better understand our motivations, values and wishes.



Illustrations from the website for An Inside Story
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3 For more information: www.an-inside-story.co.uk



A STORY OF STRENGTH PASSED ON

Once upon a time, there was a prophet. Whenever he saw misfortune threatening his people, it was his custom to go into a certain part of a deep forest to meditate. There he would light a fire, say a special prayer, and sit still. Through this process he gained enough clarity, strength, and focus to face up to and attempt to avert the danger. He shared the story many times of how he prepared himself in times of difficulty, where he went, and what he did.

Many years later, a disciple of his faced some challenges and she went to the place in the forest he had spoken about. Once there, she called out, 'I do not know with what to light the fire, but I am able to say the special prayer.' She did so and sat alone and still until she felt the clarity and focus required to deal with the challenges.

Many years after that, another disciple, who was attempting to support his community during tough times, went into the forest and called out, 'I do not know with what to light the fire, and I do not know the ancient prayer, but I know this special place, and surely my coming here will be sufficient.' He sat and meditated until he regained his strength and vision. He returned to assist his people.

Years passed by. A young woman whose family was overcome by misfortune was sitting alone at home, and with her head in her hands she called out, 'I am unable to light the fire, and I do not know that old prayer. I cannot even find my way to that forest or the place within it. All I can do is tell the story of those that came before me, of the challenges they faced, and how they found a way through.'

She sat quietly and allowed the peace and quiet to envelop her, and the stories and practices of her ancestors to reverberate within her. She reminded herself how many generations before her had sat meditating, just as she was doing. She sat still, allowing these thoughts to fill her with hope and courage until she could see a way forward for herself and her family.



STORIES PASSED ON

Nic Fine

The importance of stories and storytelling

*Grandmother to mother, grandfather to father
Those stories passed down from country to town
From brother to sister, to son and to daughter
Stories of earth, air, fire, and water
From east to west, from north to south
Stories passed on, from mouth to mouth.*

Family members, elders, teachers and mentors, writers and composers, poets and singers all play a vital role in keeping old stories alive, and in creating new ones to meet the challenges of our times. Through stories we find out about our family and community history, herstory, culture and heritage. Through stories we can root ourselves; we create a sense of identity and belonging. Stories give us inspiration and hope, teach us lessons, and show us new horizons. Through telling stories to our children, we bond with them, provide comfort before sleep, spark their imagination, inspire them,

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explore distant landscapes and possibilities, and teach them about people and relationships. Through storytelling we discover our world.

I share some of my experiences around the telling of stories, at home and at work.

My father at the foot of my bed

My love of stories began with my father perched at the foot of my bed. As a young child I so looked forward to the occasions when he would tell me a nighttime story. I don't remember him ever reading a book to me, but I do remember some wonderful tales just flowing from him. My favourite stories were focused on the adventures of Lassie, a legendary dog that rescued, protected, and befriended people. Lassie would bravely ward off evil and nasty folk. Lassie was courageous and clever, and displayed enormous stamina and strength. Lassie never gave up. I am not sure whether my father made up the stories, or if they were based

on Lassie books he had read as a youngster, or on the old black-and-white Lassie movies he had seen, but to me as a young boy, these stories were all true. Lassie was real and heroic and inspired me. I wanted to have the same qualities that Lassie showed. Lassie was my first mentor.

Storytime was magic time. I also felt very close



to my dad at those times. And when he eventually stopped telling me nighttime stories, I felt a loss. Although we always had a good relationship (with the usual father/son ups and downs) I am not sure if we ever managed to get back that feeling of intimacy and magic. But my dad's storytelling left a legacy. Many years later, I found myself sitting at the foot of the bed of one of my sons, or lying next to one of them, ready to tell the end-of-day story. Sometimes I read a story from a book, and sometimes I told what came to be

known as 'mouth stories'. These invented stories were all shaped around a particular challenge that one of my sons was facing, or a specific interest they had at the time.

To captivate a young listener, stories have to be full of adventure, interesting characters, tough challenges, a few surprises and, at the same time, fun. As an adult I enjoyed letting my imagination run riot and trusting myself that the words

would flow and that a good adventure would simply unfold. I probably looked forward to these early evening sessions as much as, if not more than, my sons did! I have clear memories of reading some wonderful and magical books to my sons. But the strongest memories that come to me from that time of being a dad to two young boys are of the intimacy and warmth between us during our evening storytelling ritual.

Being at the centre of your own story

There is something special that happens when the storyteller

places the listener or reader at the centre of a tale. My wife, who comes from a large family, has a wonderful gift for drawing and illustrating. When her sisters and brothers had children of their own, she would write a picture book for her nephews and nieces, placing each recipient as the central character in their particular story. It is wonderful to receive a specially created storybook from an aunt, but it is even better when you see that you appear on every page, and are at the centre of everything that happens in the story. These books were treasured possessions. One book followed another, continuing the tradition over two generations.

Recently a niece, now a woman of 30 with two young children of her own, showed my wife the book she had received over two decades earlier. The niece was reading it to her daughter, who could see her mother as a young child on each page. This inspired my wife to create another book, this time for her grandniece. She asked her niece what theme would be most appropriate for the little girl. 'She absolutely loves dogs,' the niece replied. And so, a beautifully illustrated book was created, with the little girl and her dog (her 'best friend') doing something different together in every picture: sitting on the beach, having a picnic in the park, dancing, reading a bedtime story, learning how to swim, and playing music.

Another grandniece recently caught her finger in a closing door – a very traumatic experience for a small child. To help the little girl make sense of the pain and shock she experienced, my wife created a book for her, the story of a young girl who caught her finger in a door. The girl in the story had a bandaged hand and finger, just like in real life. This was an excellent way for the mom to interact with her daughter around the accident and her recovery.

In her work as a counsellor, my wife has brought in this

There is something special that happens when the storyteller places the listener or reader at the centre of a tale.



concept of creating a storybook for the children she is seeing as a communication and a healing tool. She has also used this powerful tool when counselling some adults and teenagers with intellectual difficulties.

It gives the recipient an enormous sense of pride to have such a special and personalised story presented to them to take home and keep.

Rites of passage

In the HOM rites of passage programme, Moving into Manhood, we do a naming ceremony for the young men. As part of the process, before they each receive a specially chosen name created for them by the facilitating elders, we ask each participant to acknowledge their parents and grandparents by calling out the names of those who came before them. Obviously we know beforehand and prepare accordingly if any of the youngsters have been adopted, orphaned, or are living with foster parents or guardians. But what strikes us regularly is that many of the young men don't know the names of their grandparents. It's as if the generation before their parents' generation has gone missing. This lack of family knowledge also suggests that the stories passed on by family elders have gone missing for so many of our youth. We encourage young people to ask questions of their parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts; to explore stories from their elders' childhood, discover their regrets and their achievements, and find out what life was like a generation or two ago.

In another part of the Moving into Manhood programme, we take groups of young men into a secluded place in the mountains, away from their homes. As a key element of this process, we tell a story of a mythical young man, which mirrors the journey the young men are themselves going

through during this experience and in their lives as a whole. The story contains many metaphors, themes, experiences, and challenges that shed light on the way the programme is designed.

The central character of the story is a young prince who lives isolated in a castle on a hill above a village. He is not allowed to mix with the village children and is lonely. A wild man is caught in the surrounding forests and is imprisoned in a cage that is placed in the courtyard where the prince plays with a golden ball. One day, the ball rolls between the bars of the cage, out of the boy's reach. After several days of looking at his golden ball lying at the feet of the wild man, the prince finds the courage to ask him to return it. The man replies that he will do so only if the prince releases him from captivity. The prince has no idea how to do this. Besides, releasing the man from the cage is forbidden. After another few days and desperate to regain his ball, the prince once again finds the courage to tell the wild man that he doesn't know where the key to the cage is kept.

The man tells him he will find it hidden under the queen's pillow. The terrified boy tells the man that he is too scared to get the key for, if caught, the king would beat him. The man replies that it is up to him to decide whether or not he wants his golden ball back. The prince waits for a day when the king and queen are out riding in the forest, creeps into his mother's chamber, and collects the key. With trembling

Many of the young men don't know the names of their grandparents. It's as if the generation before their parents' generation has gone missing.



hands, he approaches the cage, inserts the key in the rusty old lock and struggles to turn it, cutting his finger on a piece of metal. The cage door swings open and instantly the wild man leaps out. He raises the young prince onto his strong shoulders and dashes through the dusty village streets and out into the deep, dark forest.

That is essentially the introduction to the tale. In subsequent chapters, told one at a time over five days, we follow the boy's experience, first with the wild man in the forest, and then on a journey by himself. The prince settles for a time in another village and is put to work by the community elders. There he undergoes a transition and finally emerges as a young man, now named Rising Eagle. He decides to journey back to his original home and face up to his parents, the king and queen, and to his future.

The telling of the Rising Eagle story leads us into a part of the programme in which each young man shares his own life story with the group. We devote an entire day to the process, going late into the night, giving every young man a chance to have his say. The young men speak uninterrupted, except when an elder might encourage them to continue if stuck. At the end of each story the young man's narrative is mirrored back by a couple of elders – the elders often highlight aspects of the story or suggest another way of seeing something within it. They might have words of comfort, encouragement or a challenge to add, where appropriate. They bless and thank the young man for his story. Then follows an 'acknowledgement circle' in which every listener mentions a quality of the young man that they admire, or an aspect of the story that moved or inspired them. There is no questioning or advice giving here – just pure acknowledgement.

With a group of 12 to 16 young men, this demands intense concentration and listening. To begin with, the young men's teachers said that we would never get them to sit and listen to each other for so long; they would get restless and disruptive. But over the 20 years or so of doing this exercise, we have found the very opposite to be true. We realised that if the storytellers were being authentic, then the listeners' attention was focused. Also, everyone wants an attentive audience when it's their turn to speak, and so they give that attention to others. We also realised how special it was for each young man to have time to speak undisturbed, within a safe and confidential environment, and how rare it was to have the experience of being listened to. We witnessed how, through listening to each other's stories, the young men realised they had more in common with one another than they thought. They also felt they were no longer the only ones facing a particular challenge or problem. Through sharing their stories, the young men got to know each other in new ways even after being in the same class together for ten years.

So, this storytelling section of the programme is one we keep repeating because of its value on so many levels. But to set up a powerful storytelling circle, we have to first set up a supportive and non-judgemental listening circle. Without a special kind of listening, we have discovered that stories do not get told. They remain buried deep within.



Setting up storytelling day

'If you express what is inside of you, it will save you, it can liberate you. If you hold it in, it will imprison you, it can destroy you.' (An old saying)

'What you can't express, runs your life.' (A modern saying)

How we set up the storytelling day is crucial. First, we share a relevant chapter from our story and then we speak about the intention for the day ahead. Here is an example of what gets said by one of the facilitators when introducing this process.

'Today is a very special day. The focus is on you and your life; as if you are holding up a mirror to your life and showing it like it is. Every man has a story to tell. Part of being a man is telling your story, where you come from, and where you are heading. Many men never get an opportunity to tell their story. They go through their lives feeling misunderstood, but the problem is that, as men, we don't often share who we really are, so nobody gets to know or understand us, and we therefore feel misunderstood. It takes a warrior's spirit to speak from the heart. It takes a brave, courageous man to be authentic. There are, of course, many obstacles to us speaking our truth. What are some of the reasons we don't speak out? What are the things that cause us to be silent, that prevent us from speaking?'

The group call their responses back. Some examples are 'feeling scared', 'feeling judged', 'feeling rejected', 'people don't listen', 'feeling ashamed for what I've done', 'being teased', 'being mocked', 'I don't trust other people'.

The facilitator continues: 'So, these are all good reasons why we, as men, don't speak out. You can see by what has been shared that the way we listen to each other is very important; it can have a huge effect on how people share

their stories. To give someone your listening is one of the greatest gifts you can give another human being. Today we will create a powerful listening circle where we suspend our judgements and criticisms, and just listen to one another with an open mind. Whatever gets shared here today stays with us in this circle. You don't go away from here and share another man's story. If he wants to share his own story with others, that is up to him. And what you share with us today is up to you. You get to choose what you share. We welcome all stories – of love, loss, triumphs and defeats, joy, sadness, pride, shame, friendship, betrayal. Yes, indeed, all stories are welcome here.'

The introduction is concluded by covering various protocols. And then the sharing of personal stories begins.

'Telling my story, yes, it was tough. Making what happened to me public was an important step in my recovery. But it wasn't necessarily the telling of my story that was the most difficult; it was not knowing how it would be received that was scary. Would I be believed? Would I be shamed or blamed? Would I be ridiculed? How I would be received was my greatest fear in the telling of my story.'

– A participant



Every man has a story to tell. Part of being a man is telling your story, where you come from, and where you are heading. Many men never get an opportunity to tell their story. They go through their lives feeling misunderstood, but the problem is that, as men, we don't often share who we really are, so nobody gets to know or understand us, and we therefore feel misunderstood.

Changing the focus

A colleague related an experience she had when facilitating a community discussion with young people. Despair, anger, frustration, negativity, and hopelessness dominated the conversation. The participants seemed to be stuck in their stories and the mood was sombre. My colleague acknowledged all that had been shared and the feelings that prevailed. She then decided to shift the energy in the room to see if they would be able to move the conversation forward and explore solutions. So, she set a challenge.

She asked everyone to think of just one moment where they had felt hopeful and positive about their situation. She limited contributions to one minute each because of the size of the group. Each participant managed to communicate an experience of feeling hopeful. As they went around the circle, the mood in the room shifted. People lifted their heads, their expressions changed. Changing the focus of the storytelling made it possible to shift from what was hopeless and negative to what was hopeful and contained possibilities.

The love of reading

These days, stories come in all sorts of formats, such as movies, television series or podcasts. But the question is, will the reading of books and, indeed, the production of books survive? Today most book readers seem to be from the older generation.

There is something that occurs in the process of reading that does not manifest anywhere else. The words on the page and the imagination of the reader together conjure up entire characters and landscapes. A friend once described what the magic and the beauty of reading meant for him: 'Books have taken me to places I have never been and might never



go. Books have widened my horizons and introduced me to other realities and ways of thinking. And all this, from inside my own little bedroom in my own little house. All this, with very few resources. What a gift!

Over 20 years ago, another friend's daughter asked him, 'There are so many women's book clubs in our city, so why is that we never hear about book clubs for men?' My friend replied that he did not know why, and indeed he hadn't heard of one. His daughter continued, 'Mom is in one, and dad you love reading, so why don't you start one of your own?' And that sparked him into action. He invited some friends he thought might be interested in the idea, and so began one of the very first men's book clubs in the city. I was fortunate enough to be included, and 20 years later we are still meeting. Apart from making long-standing friendships, I have been introduced to so many marvellous new writers and books, and I've had a great deal of fun along the way.

Although my wife (who is also a member of a book club) and I are both keen readers, our two sons never really took to reading for pleasure. One reason, I am sure, is that it is far easier and more sociable to immerse oneself in a movie or TV series than to sit alone and read. Also, with busy lives, reading for enjoyment takes a back seat. But as they have aged and as circumstances have changed, so has their interest in books. Two things have occurred to change the landscape. In South Africa we have had a series of power outages (referred to as 'loadshedding') so we have often been without internet. Reading books by candlelight can offer a great alternative. Then, with a prolonged period of restricted movement during lockdown due to COVID-19, my sons began spending much more time reading. One son is discovering spiritual and philosophical works that are challenging and inspiring him – and this has ignited his desire and interest to read.

*'Books have taken me to places
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my own little bedroom in my own
little house. What a gift!'*

I gifted my other son a book about three years back and occasionally he dipped into it but never managed to stay with it for long. Recently he told me that he had returned to the book and said how much he was enjoying it and finding that it reflected his own life's journey as a musician. When the reader makes a connection with the material, magic happens, and the desire to read and discover more is ignited.



*Whether or not we
know our parent/s
or lived with our
biological family, this
his/herstory is worth
exploring and is the
right place to begin.*

IT ALL STARTS AT HOME

Certainly, a good place to start, when considering the mentors, guides, coaches, role models, and influencers in our lives is right at the very beginning – with our families and parents. Whether or not we know our parent/s or lived with our biological family, this his/herstory is worth exploring and is the right place to begin. Thomas Moore profoundly wrote many years ago that ‘the ordinary arts we practise every day at home are of more importance to the soul than their simplicity might suggest’. How true!

While working on this introduction I remembered listening to one of my favourite songwriters and storytellers, Bruce Springsteen. He was recalling his father making an unusual surprise visit a few weeks before the birth of his first child. The purpose of his dad’s visit was to tell him that he hoped Bruce would not repeat the mistakes he had made as a father.

Springsteen refers to that visit as the greatest moment in his life with his dad. It felt as though the room stood still. His father had acknowledged his mistakes, and Springsteen felt this act had been a long time coming. In a sense, his father was apologising for what he had or hadn’t done for

his children. It was a ‘new end’ in their relationship, and they could now welcome a ‘new beginning’. What really remains with me is Springsteen’s description of how, on that day, his father moved from being a ‘ghost’ in his life to beginning to play an ‘ancestral role’ in his family going forward.

I found this distinction between ‘ancestors’ and ‘ghosts’ to be useful in how we can understand the roles played by those that came before us, and indeed the roles we can play for those that come after us. Springsteen felt that his father’s apology for and acknowledgement of mistakes had released him from the chain of his father’s ‘sins’ and those of the fathers that came before. He described how we either haunt our children by placing our burdens and mistakes upon them, or we assist them in laying those old burdens down and walking gently beside them. He believed that in this way, our ancestors can release us so we are free to make our own choices and live our own lives.

In Charlie Mackesy’s book, *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, the mole says: ‘I think everyone is just trying to get home.’ The boy then asks, ‘Home isn’t always a place, is it?’

Here follow some stories that all start at home.





LESSONS FROM MY ELDERS

Fairiza Brey

Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn from one another through observation, imitation and modelling. I would like to believe that I have perhaps been unconsciously influenced by this theory in my personal life journey. I share here examples of 'informal' mentors in my life. I was not formally assigned to them as a mentee, but I have embraced their beliefs and principles and am applying these principles to my life, as far as possible.



Fairiza's grandfather, Abdul Kader Brey and father Allie Brey

My grandfather and father

My paternal grandfather, Mr AK Brey, hailed from a village called Morba in India. The only son of his parents, he came to Cape Town as a young man, in around 1940, with few possessions but a strong will and vision to make a life for himself. My grandad worked as a labourer in a butchery, and then a few years later he started his own businesses, first a butchery, then a café, a hardware store, and a milk distribution business, and eventually he invested in real estate. I have fond memories of him taking me on drives in his Valiant motor vehicle when he needed to do business. I also remember sitting next to him when he led prayer meetings at our home, once a week on Sunday evenings. I vividly remember mom asking me, while the prayer meeting was in progress, to count the pairs of shoes that had been left outside. This gave her an idea of how many cups of tea she needed to serve.

Grandad was incredibly spiritual and a people's person. He was active on the local mosque committee and other charitable organisations and had the reputation of being a very generous and compassionate man. Although he died a successful businessman, my grandad was not materialistic and he had a soft spot for those who struggled financially. I was told he would lend people money without worrying much about whether he would be paid back, and that he sold land and properties for 'next to nothing'. He was kind to his tenants and most of them became his friends. Maybe because he was a self-made man, he was able to relate to the underprivileged. He was indeed a humble soul. The lesson I learnt from my grandad is that it is in giving that you receive – giving of one's material possessions never makes one poorer.

My grandad passed on at the age of 54 in the holy city of Mecca in 1973 when I was seven years old. After this sad loss

to the family, my dad, who was the oldest son, took over the leadership role.

My dad often said to us as children, 'Study as hard as you can, always do your best, because this time will never be repeated, this opportunity will never come again. Education is important. Remember people can take everything from you – your money, your car, your house – but they can't take your education from you.' Every end of the year, during the final exam, he repeated these words to us, and they have stuck with me.

I love and value my dad for inspiring, motivating and supporting us. As a child I would think he was just nagging, but his 'nagging' paid off. I'm still studying at the age of 53!

In fact, both my parents believed there are no shortcuts in life; you have to work hard to gain success. They did not believe in shortcuts and in the concept of 'tomorrow is another day'. 'Do what you can today,' they would say, 'because you may not be alive tomorrow.'

My mother and grandmother

Mom is very much an independent person; whatever she can do for herself, she does. Her motto is: 'One day, when I die, I will rest, but while I'm alive, there is no time to rest.' This philosophy means that she always puts herself last, and although I feel that is remarkable and incredibly noble, I worry that it is also unhealthy.

Mom is an amazing soul and is loved by everyone. From the first time they meet her, people simply call her 'ma'. My mom is everyone's ma, from family to friends, domestic helpers, and strangers at the door. But Mom also reminds me regularly, 'Learn to say no. You cannot save everyone. You need to look after yourself, too. Help others, but remember,

The lesson I learnt from my grandad is that it is in giving that you receive – giving of one's material possessions never makes one poorer.



Fairoza's mother, Aisha Brey



*Don't waste and don't live above
your means, times are hard.*



Fairoza's maternal grandmother, Kulsum Harneker

there is a limit.' Yes mom, I have realised that one needs to be whole and healthy to be able to help others. This, I feel, is work in progress.

My maternal grandmom was a people's person, always smiling, whose home was welcoming to close and extended family and friends. She was a businesswoman and an excellent cook. No one ever left her home without eating a meal, and everyone was referred to as *my kind* (my child). My mom, likewise, cultivated this ideology.

My mom was the third born of eight children and, just like her mom before her, she has a reputation for cooking huge pots of food. Not a day goes by when she does not feed one of her 'daily customers' at her door. She believes that she has to have enough food in her home for anyone who might visit, and the extended family knows very well that there is always food at Auntie Aisha's house. I call it the abundance theory: rather have too much and have leftovers than serve your guests too little. I also learnt this from my grandmom and mom. On the other hand, another of Mom's mottos is, 'Don't waste and don't live above your means, times are hard.' As you will have noticed by now, food has an important place in my family's lives. It nourishes, but also brings people together, opening space for meaningful interactions. Over meals, people spend quality time and share experiences and offer emotional support. My mom introduced the tradition of Family Fridays in my nuclear family. We gather on Fridays, kids and grandkids catch up on the week's events, and older siblings reminisce about their childhood days, with loads of chuckles. Family Fridays serve as a debriefing session and a time to rest, relax, and recharge for the week ahead. My mom is the master chef and the family's major pillar of support and strength. Her deep spiritual values have been the source of inspiration in many challenging times.

In my own life I have tried to emulate the values, principles, and practices my elders lived by.

I have realised that assisting someone with basic needs, such as food, is so rewarding. I guess Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is as relevant today as it was years ago. Sharing is caring. By feeding someone, we are also displaying caring and love. I also believe that a 'hungry man is an angry man'. Often, I have students who are struggling financially, who do not even have basic food or money for transport, and I attempt to assist. This is only possible through the grace of the Almighty. I was nicknamed 'Mama Bear' by a student, who said that I am her second mom, her mom away from home. I was deeply touched by her words. Often students see their teachers as ogres who are stiff and stern, detached from the students' emotional needs and there to pressurise them.

I am convinced that social work (my first degree), and particularly community work, are in my veins; that I inherited this from my elders. I am a third generation Indian Muslim South African. Although I describe myself as predominantly Indian, and I practise the Indian traditions, my late paternal grandmother was a coloured woman who converted to Islam and my maternal ancestors are from an Irish background. I firmly believe that, despite being a diverse rainbow nation, we share common values that bond us together as a nation. Certainly, food bonds people, no matter their culture, religion, language, race or gender. I feel that we all want to be contented in life and to have a clear purpose. We all have a need to love and be loved, and in times of real difficulty, we need the intervention of a higher power who anchors us as human beings, no matter our religion. As my late dad used to say: 'Live and let live.'

*In my own life I have tried to
emulate the values, principles and
practices my elders lived by.*





TWENTY LIFE LESSONS: LEARNING WHICH TO FOLLOW

René Manradge

Lesson 1 - A man can father children with several different women

As a child, one of the things I learnt early on was that I was the product of an affair. My mother, Belzina Idina Brown, arrived in England in 1953. When her husband, Joe Brown, had become ill and died prematurely in Jamaica, my mother had been deeply affected and sought a new life in England. She left her two younger children in the care of their two older sisters and her mother, my grandmother. Granny was by all accounts a formidable woman. Sadly, I never got to meet her.

My father was in a relationship with someone else when he met my mother. I was born on 12 December 1956 and named Rennie Alfred Johnson Brown. I was given my mother's married name as I was illegitimate, 'a bastard', the term used then to describe children born out of wedlock. From looking at pictures of my father and hearing stories about him, without knowing him I understood that he was very stylish, handsome, and charming and that he 'had a way with women'.

I also had an uncle who lived nearby. He was tall, light-skinned and handsome, and often described as a 'snappy dresser'. He was married but had extramarital affairs and fathered several children with other women. The men talked about him. He had kudos and status. The message, even if

I could not comprehend it at the time, was that men can have more than one woman and father children by different women.

Lesson 2 – The shade of your skin and texture of your hair make a difference

Being fair in complexion, my uncle was often referred to as being a 'red skin', a term that went back to slavery days when white plantation owners raped female slaves and fathered children with them. The fairer skinned mixed-race (mulatto) children would often become the 'house niggers' – brought to work in the plantation houses as nannies, maids, and servants as they were deemed more attractive than their darker skinned compatriots. If you were dark, you most likely stayed working in the fields. Added to my family heritage was Asian Indian and Chinese blood; my mother and her ten siblings had long, black wavy hair – 'good hair' was the term used to describe it – and a mixture of Chinese, Indian, and white features mixed in with their blackness, which was highly desirable amongst the blacks of the West Indies. They were also described as 'coolie', meaning a mix of Indian and Black West Indian.

As a child I knew of a girl who tried to lighten her skin with bleach but did not fully understand the significance of such an act at the time. These early attitudes link to the modern-day practice of skin lightening or 'bleaching' now prevalent in the West Indies, Europe, and across the African and Indian continents. 'Conking', the practice of straightening or relaxing black hair, and plastic surgery to reduce the size and width of the black nose can be traced back to these changing attitudes to skin colour and features amongst slaves and colonised people. One of my sisters told me that of the two men that were pursuing her when she was in Jamaica,



one was a 'coolie' with wavy hair and lighter skin and the other was dark, and that his darkness was a deciding factor in whom she chose.

Lesson 3 – Look good and dress well to get praise

As young as four or five, I would get praised on how cute I was, how handsome I looked, especially when my mother dressed me up in my short pants suits with my clip-on tie. At social gatherings, weddings, and christenings the women would give me this attention. Growing up, the more attention

I gave to how I looked, the more I was told that I dressed well, had style, was a 'slick' dresser, and looked good. This began to form an important part of my identity, something I would become known for, and was the start of my seeking external validation.

By the time I entered high school, that lesson became even more important. It was evident that my mother and I were poor, and she could not afford the cool fashionable clothes brands my peers had. I would often have to get cheaper alternatives. This led to me feeling that I was not quite good enough. So, I compensated. I created a persona. I was tall, good looking, messed around with girls, and was the bad boy gravitating to others like me.

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Lesson 4 - Don't mess with us

At primary school I was bullied for a short period by three older boys – two white and one black – for what reason I will never know. One day after school they were picking on me, and a friend's older brother, Thomas Griffiths, who lived near the school was informed. Thomas was not someone you messed with. He was strong and fearless and came from a large family with four brothers; he was confident in his physical self. He arrived and put the three of them on the ground – it was something to see, they were terrified of him – and he told me to do what I wanted to them.

I gave them all a kicking and they never bothered me again. The message was clear: 'Don't mess with me, I have backup.' With the confidence that having these older brothers gave us, my friends and I became more physical. As we grew in confidence and became tighter as a group, my friends no longer called on their older brothers to fight for them – it wasn't needed. We were becoming more like them, entering our mid-teens.

Lesson 5 – Forge your own identity

My friends and I knew we were poor, but we never felt poor. We had homes, we had each other. We were happy and content with our lot. There were times when I would be given cornmeal porridge or rice pudding for dinner, and I would



be happy that our dinner was a dessert. It was only in my teenage years that I realised that these were times when my mother did not have money to buy food.

My friends and I were children of the Windrush generation. At the end of the Second World War in 1945, England needed rebuilding and a labour force. The invitation was sent out to the British colonies to come to the United Kingdom, the 'mother country', to build a new life and many took up the offer as there was not a lot of opportunity at home. The term 'Windrush' comes from the MV Empire Windrush, one of the first ships to sail with post-war immigrants to the United Kingdom in 1948.

With the adults came many children who would later become our role models. Several of us did not have present fathers, and those who did could not identify with them. Our parents were raising us in an alien land that had promised prosperity but delivered poor housing, low paid work, racism, inequality and violence, and we watched them suffer in silence; their meekness was offensive to us. We were not like them, and we were not like the British. As far back as I can remember, the words 'Nigger', 'Coon' and 'Wog' were applied by white people to my friends and me when we were growing up. It was within this hostile context that we had to find out who we were and forge our own identity.

Several of us had Jamaican parents and others had parents from Montserrat, Saint Lucia, and Antigua, and we gravitated to role models we could relate to – the slightly older males who were brought to England from the Caribbean or born shortly after their parents' arrival. Like us, they were mostly Jamaicans who did not fit in and rebelled against their parents and the society they found themselves in. We learnt how to speak a Jamaican patois like they did, and also talk a mock Cockney like the white people. We would switch from

one to the other, depending on who we were talking to – a valuable skill. Only a true Jamaican would be able to tell that I was not born in Jamaica, and I often fooled even them.

These young men who dressed in tailor-made clothes and had expensive leather shoes became our heroes. They hung out in parks playing football, went to night clubs and house dances, had money and lots of women, smoked weed, and took no crap from white people. They had cool nick names, like Jessie James, Eli and Yogi Bear. During the long, hot summer holidays we got to hang out with them and wanted to be just like them. We did not know or even think about how they afforded their lifestyle – we just wanted it. The aforementioned Thomas Griffiths was not like these guys. He was not flashy, did not care for their lifestyle, but he was respected all the same. I think he looked out for me as I did not have an older brother.

Our way in was via older brothers who were widely feared. Yogi Bear, while not tall was supremely strong. I once watched him fight eight policemen who had come to arrest him; it took everything they had to subdue him. Eli, physically intimidating, generally took what he wanted. Jessie James was six-feet-four-inches tall, handsome and had a physical presence. I looked at him and saw how he was treated, how women fawned over him, talked about him. This keyed into my earlier experiences; I aspired to looking cool and being a charmer. With our links to these older teenagers and young men, we were connected – we were treated differently by them and the people around them. Older girls would say to me 'If you were just a few years older', and of course this boosted my ego. The 'Player' was being born!

Lesson 6 - Be a tight, loyal unit

We became a tight-knit group with affiliations, and we would often be affirmed for that: 'You guys are tight, solid.' This became our brand. At first this was recognised by our role models, and in later years noted by the youngsters coming up behind us who did not seem to have the same tight groups. Even now, in our sixties, we are known as 'the Boys'. There was a term 'name brand', said in Jamaican patois, that we applied to ourselves. 'Name brand' meant quality, a branded name like Nike or Adidas. Our sense of who we were was growing, along with our egos and reputation.

My friends also had older brothers who were law abiding, had jobs, worked hard, and were moderately successful by the standards of the day. But they never featured in our lives; we did not see them. We gravitated to what was exciting, cool, and dangerous, as young men do. Cocaine and heroin usage was a huge factor in this.

Ironically, our role models told us not to be like them. 'Stay in school, get an education and qualifications,' these guys repeatedly told us. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. How could they tell us that, while doing the exact opposite?

I did not care for education, even though I enjoyed and was good at English and history, and had a natural aptitude for art. I also got good grades in woodwork and metalwork and was in the rugby team. My English and French teachers,

Ironically, our role models told us not to be like them. 'Stay in school, get an education and qualifications,' these guys repeatedly told us. Their pleas fell on deaf ears. How could they tell us that, while doing the exact opposite?

both white women, told me I was different from my friends, that I was cleverer, and that I could achieve if I wanted to. I see now that they were being supportive and encouraging, but at 14 the last thing I wanted to hear was that I was different from my friends. When I looked around me in class, I saw a sea of white faces, with only one other black student, a girl. I did not want to be there; I wanted

to be with my friends. While I could do the work, I was busy creating my own persona, fooling around with girls, getting into trouble, stealing.

Lesson 7 – Don't trust white authority

At the age of 14, I was struck by a teacher in my eye for making funny faces to the class. I reacted and threw a chair at him, although it did not hit him. I walked out of school and stayed out for six weeks. I was told that the only way I could return was to accept that I was at fault, even though he had struck me, and take the punishment of being caned. After six weeks and with my mother badgering me to return, I did. I was incredibly angry at the situation but relented for my mother's sake.

I was reminded of when my mother and I attended a meeting with Miss Greenhouse, the headmistress of the Annex, the lower secondary school. We sat on two sides of a wooden desk, with me and my mother opposite this old white woman – 'Granny Greenhouse' as we would later call



her. As they talked, to my utter shock and amazement I heard my mother say, 'If he is rude, beat him.' In that moment I felt completely betrayed by my mother. How could she be telling this old white woman, a stranger to us, to beat me? I was fuming.

Now, at 14, that sense of betrayal returned.

Not long after that I was expelled from school. This was instigated by the headmaster of the school who saw me as a troublemaker. To get me expelled, he fabricated a story about me that involved a white female pupil. I was now a truly angry young man and beginning to see white people in authority as untrustworthy. That same year I was placed in another school and got into a fight and was again expelled after only two weeks. At 14 my education was over.

By the age of 15 my friends and I were into petty crime and not long after

that, serious crime. By now, we fully understood how our role models funded their lifestyle. They were quickly disappearing into juvenile detention centres and prison – but we were into the same business; their lifestyle was now ours.

Lesson 8 – Follow the antiheroes

We – my friends and I – were not politically motivated. There were black role models – Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and

the civil rights movement; Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale and the Black Panthers. But they were all just before our time and were not present in our lives in England. There was Muhammad Ali who for a time was everywhere. But while we could feel proud of his achievements and his stance against being drafted into the Vietnam war, he – like the others – was American. Some local leaders were trying to persuade us in the direction of Pan Africanism, but it was also not a strong enough motivating force.

It was the 70s, and the term 'Blaxploitation' was coined for a wave of films produced between 1970 and 1975 for the African American market. These films showed black people as the central characters not linked to the old images of the grinning, eye rolling, happy, compliant negroes who acted at the behest of white people. Black stars like Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, who were big in the 60s, had a dignity about them, but we could not relate to them in the way we did to these new antiheroes. One example was *Shaft*, produced in 1971. The title character, John Shaft, a PI (private investigator), was played by Richard Roundtree, a newcomer to the acting scene. Shaft was cool, he dressed in leathers and took no crap from anyone. The role he played was visceral – he fought and shot his way through, beat 'The Man' (the police) and the mob and the black gangsters and casually slept around – all while doing the right thing. Isaac Hayes did the soundtrack and sang the coolest theme tune ever. Shaft went on to spawn two sequels: *Shaft's Big Score* and *Shaft in Africa*, as well as a television series of the same name with Richard Roundtree reprising the role throughout. After the success of *Shaft*, Hollywood took notice of the genre.

Blaxploitation films followed, such as *Super Fly* in 1972 with Ron O'Neal, a mixed-race hustler who outwits gangsters and police to get the money and the drugs. The soundtrack

The moral ambiguity of the films and male role models left their mark. Film and storytelling have immense power on young, impressionable minds.



by Curtis Mayfield produced the hit single, 'Pusherman'. *Trouble Man* was also produced in 1972, with Robert Hooks as another cool and tough PI, indifferent to women. Marvin Gaye did the soundtrack for this movie, producing the hit single, 'Trouble Man'.

Seeing the huge returns on these relatively small budget movies, Hollywood wanted to broaden their appeal. *Cleopatra Jones*, produced in 1973, with Tamara Dobson playing the title role – a CIA narcotics agent – resulted in the sequel *Cleopatra and the Casino of Gold*. *Foxy Brown*, produced in 1974 with Pam Grier in the lead role, changed how African American women were portrayed on screen; they were strong, confident and resourceful. In *Black Belt Jones*, produced in 1974, Jim Kelly gave us our first black martial artist. He had been in *Enter the Dragon* the year before with Bruce Lee. He kicked ass and looked good doing it.

These antiheroes were cool, stylish and black. For the most part, the characters were morally ambiguous. The male characters were indifferent to women and worked outside of the law. They had their hearts in the right place, but the message was: you do what you have to do to come out from under; to get what is yours, you have to fight your white oppressor.

The moral ambiguity of the films and male role models left their mark. Film and storytelling have immense power on young, impressionable minds. These films connected with our anger and frustrations and reinforced our sense of mistrust of whites and our general 'f*** them' attitude. Also, it was the seventies and we were developing a sense of style, with brightly coloured flares, wide lapels, and platform shoes. While this fashion was not created by us, it seemed to fit our emerging identity in our mid- to late teenage years, when being cool and strutting with attitude was important. The



Painting of Richard Roundtree by René Manradge

soundtracks to these movies were equally important. The theme tunes, along with Marvin Gaye's masterpiece, *What's Going On* (1971), were a social commentary on the times and expressed the sentiment of a disenfranchised people. And once the film was over, we had the music to remind us. Marvin Gaye went on to produce the album *Let's Get It On* in 1973, which followed the ups and downs of a relationship. With the title track and its sexual lyrics, it became something I often used in my own courtship of women.

These films came to an end towards the mid-seventies, as the studios received criticism and condemnation from black pressure groups for their portrayal of negative role models and stereotypes of black people, which only reinforced the



prejudices of white people. The films were also criticised for adding to the objectification of the black man as a sexual being. Audiences also tired of the genre, and the films lost popularity. But they had made a lasting impression on us.

Growing up with a mother who never really talked to me, I spent a lot of time watching old black-and-white films on the television and fell in love with the fashions and styles of the forties and fifties. Later, I began to realise that, except for the likes of Sidney Poitier and Harry Belafonte, I did not

see anyone that looked like me in mainstream media. It was not until those seventies Blaxploitation films that I and many young black people connected to a black culture that was beyond our black West Indian, British identities.

Mandingo, produced in 1975, with Ken Norton, a heavyweight boxing champion, playing Mede in the title role was a departure from the other films in that it showed the harsh realities of how slaves were treated on the plantations. It

fuelled our feelings of anger and hatred for whites. Then in 1977, *Roots*, a book by Alex Haley about the history of slavery, which covered several generations, tracing slavery from Africa to the colonies to America, was dramatised as a television series and our feelings of anger, hatred, mistrust and enmity towards white people grew. The initial central character was Kunta Kinte, an African abducted from Africa and sold into slavery. He was proud and defiant and never accepted his

situation, constantly trying to escape, before having his feet smashed (a practice known as 'hobbling'). The men were savagely beaten, the women raped, and their children taken away from them. And the practice of making an example of any slave that was disobedient or attempted to escape was particularly harsh. We had known about slavery but seeing it on our television screens, week after week, was gripping. Couple this with our own experiences of casual and structural racism, and we were primed. We fought white people, we 'f****d' white women, and we targeted whites in our crimes. We did know white people we liked, some could even be called friends, and for several years I had a white girlfriend. But the underscore of how we really thought of white people was always present.

Lesson 9 – Avoid heavy drugs

By the time I was in my mid-twenties, I had been accused and charged by police who gave false evidence against me on several occasions. I had experienced physical and racial abuse from the police and other sections of the white community. I had also been incarcerated and had an extensive criminal record. Because of my experiences with the police and the deep enmity I had for them, I said to myself that I just wanted to kill one. I was indifferent – male or female, black or white – if they wore the uniform, they were all the same to me. Fortunately, this was never more than a thought.

I had been in racially motivated situations where I thought I might die and was prepared to kill in defence of my life. I carried a knife and had been stabbed, although not seriously. The reality is that I was lucky not to have been killed or to have been given a long prison sentence. Many of my role models and contemporaries were now doing lengthy prison terms; some had been killed. Mental health issues also

I wondered how my children and especially Candice, as a girl, might see me and the way I treated women. What was I role modelling to them?



began to take their toll, with some suffering breakdowns or psychotic episodes exacerbated by drug use. Many role models were now heroin and cocaine addicts and were pale shadows of their former selves. While I smoked weed, I saw the destruction of cocaine and heroin on them and other friends and decided not to go down that road. I was too vain – it was not a good look.

Lesson 10 – Lie to and cheat on all women

At the age of 24 I was settled in my own place, a one-bedroom flat. Prior to that, I had lived in a total of eight one-bedroom rented accommodations with my mother. This new space of mine allowed me to develop my reputation as ‘sweet boy’, ‘cool’, ‘galist’,⁴ ‘player’. At any given time, I would have several women on the go, and would also be having casual sex along the way with others.

I slept around recklessly. At 21 I had my first child, a boy, Michael. In the same year, another son, Simon, was born, and two years later, Candice, my first girl. She was followed a year later by Andre. So, I had four children by four different women in just four years! Many other women had abortions or miscarried.

I remember telling my father over the phone that I was having another child with a third woman. He was cross with me and scolded me, ‘How can you be having all these children with different women?’ I was surprised at this, for how could he say that to me? What made him different to me? I came away thinking, ‘you hypocrite’ and ‘f*** you’. I did not have any contact with him for another seven years.

I did feel responsible, but the headache of these women

now wanting things of me, and the dramas of juggling these relationships, as they were now becoming known to each other, made life extremely difficult. I started coaxing women into being the ‘side chick’. I would have my main girlfriend, and those who had the children would be the ‘affair’.

The choices I had made were catching up with me.

Lesson 11 – Question your life

With the birth of my daughter Candice in 1979, I began to consider who I was and what my future might look like. I wondered how my children and especially Candice, as a girl, might see me and the way I treated women. What was I role modelling to them? This was a consideration, and although I changed nothing at that time, the seed was planted. Her birth was the first catalyst; I was questioning my life.

During the 80s, I worked in retail, starting in a builders’ merchant at age 21, and then changing to clothing and finally menswear, later becoming a manager. I liked having the responsibility and the prestige. I had to lie about my criminal record on application forms and in interviews and they never checked up. But I was always aware that if my background came to light I would be fired. I made sure that my personal and professional life never met.

After several years of working in retail I decided I wanted to do something different. I also wanted to be open about who I was, not continually lie about or hide my background. I was good at selling; my skills of reading people and listening to them, and coming across as sincere, charming, and unassuming were ideal for a salesperson, but I was becoming disillusioned as I felt it was just another way of conning people. I had been taught that if a clothing item doesn’t suit a customer, or even if it is not the right size, you make the sale – and this was no longer how I wanted to work.

4 ‘Galist’ is Jamaican slang for womaniser.





*A Leap Confronting Conflict training
- René leading a prison officer*

Lesson 12 – Explore and grow

Eventually I left retail. I have always been good with my hands and decided to get trained in carpentry. But after a few weeks of clashing with the white instructor, whom I felt was racist, I was kicked off the course. Echoes of school.

Then I had a chance meeting with an old school friend, Keith Nauman, who was white but had been friendly with the black guys. He had started a building company with his friend Vince, whom I knew. Keith offered me work, at first labouring. He nicknamed me the 'Black Paddy', a reference to the Irish as hard workers. I had taken up weight training and

with this hard physical work began to fill out. After a year I had worked alongside plasterers, bricklayers, plumbers and, more importantly, Tony the carpenter, from whom I learnt a lot. After two years I could do aspects of all these trades and eventually left the company and worked for myself. After several years of this, I was again becoming restless and disillusioned.

I began to wonder what could I have achieved if I had stayed on at school; regret was beginning to creep in and gnaw at me. How might my life have been? When I was 21, I had returned to education and taken evening classes to get a GCSE grade B in English, but I had not taken it further. At the age of 30, after the death of my mother, my partner Helen encouraged me to return to studying. I enrolled in a pre-foundation course in art and design at college, and the following year I enrolled in a foundation course with a view to working towards a degree. Helen was attending the same college, but we separated shortly after I started – and for the first time in years, I was single. During this time, I had some contact with my father, as he had come to see my mother shortly before she died. We kept up some contact, but it was sporadic and not meaningful.

Lesson 13 – Discover what you have to give

One of my tutors, a white woman whose name I forget, was encouraging and extremely supportive of me. She invited me to discuss furthering my studies – I was ready to listen. She noted how I worked well with the younger students and helped them, and she suggested that I combine my knowledge of construction with art to become a teacher in craft design and technology. Although this seemed the obvious fit, given my earlier experiences of education I decided this was not for me. But an interest in working with

young people was sparked, and I looked around for how I might do this.

It was in my local library that I saw a leaflet inviting people to attend an open day, to get an introduction to free training in conflict resolution and a placement in a youth club to run conflict resolution workshops. I was not sure what this really meant but I went along. I did the day workshop and enjoyed it. There I met Nic Fine and Fiona Macbeth, the trainers, who were both engaging and seemed like nice people and I was invited onto the six-week programme (called Leap Islington). The training was intensive and challenged all aspects of who I was, stripping away my carefully crafted persona, getting to something beneath.

I was placed in the Mayville youth club, and my first workshop was with a group of white teenage girls, mostly of Irish decent. It was challenging; at one point I had to stop the workshop to discuss with them the way they frequently called each other 'c**t'. I was a black man – six-feet-one-inch tall – discussing with a group of young white girls their use of a word related to the female anatomy. It was uncomfortable, but as we talked, I saw some of the girls begin to consider the issue. It was in that moment that I became sold on doing this kind of work.

My placement was successful, so much so that I was invited to stay on and become a paid part-time youth worker. I went on to get a youth work qualification from the Islington council and took a job as a youth worker at the local YMCA, which also housed Leap, the charity that Nic worked for. I worked four evenings a week with different age groups. I was enjoying my newfound role and the responsibilities that went with it.

Nic later invited me to join a new pool of trainers at Leap. I did the training and found myself again being challenged

by him and Fi. At times it was extremely uncomfortable, and I was often left feeling vulnerable and exposed. My carefully crafted persona of 'Mr Cool, the player' was being eroded. As challenging as this was, I always felt that Nic and Fi were caring and genuine. I was learning to trust these white people.

Lesson 14 – Find and be a positive role model

Nic was my first positive male role model and nothing like me. He was Jewish, South African, middle class by my reckoning at the time. Rather than be conscripted to fight and oppress the black population during apartheid, he had left South Africa, and that spoke to me about his character. He was tall, ordinary in looks and physical stature, and unconcerned about being cool or tough or playing around with women. But he had values and ethics and a confidence in himself that appealed to me as I was emerging from my past to be different, do better, be a positive role model to my children, and get more from life. Although Nic is only several years older than me, looking back, he may have represented a father figure or an older brother. Nic and I formed a firm friendship built on openness and honesty that has lasted to this day.

In 1990, not long after I met Nic, Nelson Mandela was freed from prison. Black people throughout the world

No one is born a criminal. No one is born a racist. People learn these things from others. So, if we want change in the world then we must role model it for our young people, the next generation.





René and Nic working in a London youth detention facility

identified with this man who would become the first democratically elected black leader of South Africa. Madiba was a role model for the world.

Meeting Nic has had a lasting and profound impact on me and has helped shape my life. I was extremely fortunate – it was a chance meeting, serendipity, the right place and

right time, and I was open and ready to meet such a person. I cannot say for sure, but had I met Nic as a teenager or in my early twenties, I doubt whether we would have connected.

Over the next 15 years, I worked in schools, prisons, and youth provisions with the most marginalised young people in society, and I trained all the people who worked with them, including teachers and police. At one point, I was working with groups comprised entirely of police personnel. I remember once sitting down and looking around the group and thinking, ‘How did I get here?’

At first, in my work I shared my background to show that change was possible and so that black youngsters could relate their lives to mine, which helped them relate to the work we were doing in the programme. As I got older, my past mattered less as, separated by time and age, I clearly was not like these young people, and it was my ability to engage that made the difference in being able to develop relationships. Now I was a role model.

Nowadays, the need for positive role models is greater than ever as many young people are experiencing far greater challenges than I and my friends faced in the seventies and eighties. While the issues that have scarred and ravaged generations of young people are still the same – poverty, drugs, lack of opportunities, systemic racism – in some ways, these problems have become more extreme. The lure of negative role models is still extremely enticing and attractive, especially when it is ‘dressed up’ as entertainment, material wealth or a false sense of power and belonging.

No one is born a criminal. No one is born a racist. People learn these things from others. So, if we want change in the world then we must role model it for our young people, the next generation.

Lesson 15 – Reclaim your name

In 1994, I sought to change my surname as it was that of a dead man I had never met. I decided to take my mother's maiden name of Manradge. On my birth certificate I saw that my name was written as René Alfred Johnson Brown. This was a revelation to me; I think it was just a mistake at the time, as my mother had always written my name as 'Rennie'. I decide to rename myself, René Alfred Johnson Manradge. I'm not sure why I kept my father's first and middle names as I do not feel any affinity to him, and I rarely use my full name unless required to. That said, I have come to terms with the fact that I am alive because of him and for that I give thanks. I had a new name that fitted with the new me.

I also believe that the family name Manradge comes from the Indian Manraj and may have changed over time. I have no evidence to support this, however there are several different spellings within the family. They were a rural family and literacy may have been a factor in the recording of names.

Lesson 16 – Follow core principles that assist your development

Leap held four core principles that informed all we did. The personal development work I experienced as a participant on Leap courses assisted me to let go of my past mistakes, take responsibility for my actions, and envision a way forward for myself. Apart from assisting me in my own development, these core principles, like building blocks, gave me something specific to pass on to others:

Developing potential – A commitment to developing ourselves and empowering others; taking a lead in our own lives; working for the best for ourselves and others; working with others to recognise the potential they have

in themselves; and finally, examining ourselves, our own behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs: where they come from, and how they influence who and how we are.

Being responsible – In practice this means being accountable for our words and actions at all times; keeping our word and dealing with our mistakes; recognising and owning our own thoughts and feelings; and finally, increasing our understanding of how the past influences our behaviour in order to develop the range of choices available to us today.

Creating communication – In practice this means expressing ourselves fully and effectively in all our interactions; and articulating our thoughts, feelings, and requests responsibly. It also means developing our ability to create and maintain effective relationships; distinguishing different types of communication and developing skills to hold empowering conversations; and finally, listening to people, recognising the place from which they are speaking, and the place we are speaking to.

Building community – This means a commitment to developing and sustaining a supportive, holistic community that promotes responsibility, creative communication, and the development of individual and group potential. In practice it means valuing and welcoming difference – developing an understanding of the relevance of others' background, class, education, race, and gender; discovering common ground and building appropriate and realistic agreements; giving and receiving support; and finally, contributing to the lives of others and allowing others to contribute to ours.

These principles shaped everything I did, from my work to how I lived my life, and they still do today. They are the constant, the platform I stand on. I make mistakes sometimes, fall short of the ideal, but I see myself as a work in progress, always learning.



Lesson 17 – Recognise the power of connection

It is important for young people to have positive role models they can identify with and look to for guidance and support, to learn from and gain a sense of identity. That said, in my work as a group facilitator and trainer over the last 31 years, I have seen the power of people connecting across ethnicity, age and gender divides, and I believe that when the barriers that segregate us are broken, the value is exponential. To have someone who is not like you connect with you opens you up to possibilities that might not be present with someone who is like you or has come from a similar background. It is in these differences that people can come together, as these times of the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd have shown us.

One of my most memorable experiences was working with a group of fourteen Year 10s who were all on the cusp of being expelled from their school. Four of the group went on to do more work with us on a residential leadership course facilitated by two other men, one black and one white, with myself as team leader. Because of their behaviour towards the staff, we decided to suspend the course and work with these young men on what they were going to do by way of reparation. To their credit, they accepted responsibility and the consequences for their behaviour and apologised. They enrolled in another programme with us, and three went on to become trainers, delivering workshops to adults and young people around the country. Watching them develop as trainers and young people was rewarding. Ahmed, the star of the group, completely turned his life around and later went to university and returned to Leap as a development worker. I felt immensely proud of him, and it has been amazing to witness him growing into a fine young adult. I don't claim to have been

a role model to him but have been fortunate to have been a part of his journey.

Over the years I have seen many young people transform their lives and have seen adults be amazed by them and their peers be influenced by them. I've been rewarded with their enthusiasm and energy, and the sheer fun I have had in working with them; it has given me so much of value.

Lesson 18 – Take responsibility for your actions

I had to step up and take responsibility for my earlier actions. I fought for custody of my first son, Michael, and won; and I won visitation rights for my daughter. My relationships with my children and their mothers are often positive, sometimes extremely challenging, and have included spells of them not communicating with me. I brought my children together when they were young so that they would know each other, and they have also developed relationships independently of me. I was determined not to be absent in their lives, like my father; I wanted to be a positive role model. I have not always held to the standards I set for myself; it has been tough and continues to be so to this day.

I am now married and have three children with my wife. We are currently going through a separation after 22 years of being together in a committed relationship. There is no one else involved. Our oldest, Renai, is 21, in her final year of university, and a fine, resourceful young woman. Our youngest are 15-year-old non-identical twins: a girl, Kennedy and a boy, Kalan. They are finding their feet as young teenagers and are thriving.

I have tried to exemplify three things to my children: first, to be responsible and accountable for my actions, to clean up my mistakes and accept the consequences, no matter how tough, and to ensure they don't happen again; second, to be



reliable, keep to my word and do as I say; third, to give service to others and to do whatever I do to the best of my ability. I have been fortunate for much of my working life to be able to impact on the lives of others in a meaningful way.

I know these lessons have come directly out of my former life of being a criminal, and from my irresponsible sexual behaviour. I have worked hard to turn my life around and stand for something different.

Lesson 19 – Transform your relationships with women

It is also important to note the impact Fi Macbeth had on me in those early days, and the many women, from a variety of cultures and backgrounds I have met over the years, whom I count as friends and colleagues and for whom I have love and respect. They have had a huge impact on my life and continue to do so.

I am a firm believer in young people having the positive and balanced influence of both male and female energies. In particular, young men must develop respect for women in these times of sexualised imagery and objectification of women in the media. I have worked hard to teach my sons and the young men I work with to treat women with respect



and equality. I have been clear with them about my own past and the consequences of my earlier behaviour towards women so that they fully understand where I'm coming from. At my fiftieth birthday party, my daughter Candice spoke and said that I was the best man she knew. I was moved to tears to hear those words, made even more poignant given my past. My daughter looked at me and saw a real man.

Lesson 20 – Stay with the journey

I have come a long way from living in rented one-room accommodation, running around the streets of north London, creating a persona of 'Mr Cool', the player, hustler, criminal. I have been extremely fortunate to have met individuals along the way who supported me in navigating through my early challenges. I would also like to thank those two white teachers who saw something in me and tried to bring it out, although it did not happen at that time. I believe they helped me to follow my later path. It has been a long journey, and it is not over yet.

I have had three careers, and the third has been rewarding in so many ways. I have worked with all sectors of society – schools, communities, prisons, and the corporate world – on a range of topics and issues and continue to do so. I have made meaningful and lasting relationships and have had amazing opportunities. I live comfortably in our four-bedroom house with a garden and a creative space. I have returned to art and painting and hope to develop myself as an artist. Although, in truth, at times I find myself still wanting to have fun and play, I now have status and dignity as an elder with age and experience. I am 63, I am still making mistakes, it is how I learn. The difference is, I like who I am, and I am finally happy in my own skin.





THE GIFTS MY PARENTS GAVE ME, I PASS ON

Elaine Maane

The gift of a beautiful childhood

I was born on 24 May 1971 in Lusaka, Zambia; one of ten children and the first girl for my parents, after my two

brothers. I remained my parents' only daughter until I was ten years old, and I remember my mother's pampering and how she always made sure that my hair was well plaited – such beautiful days those were. As the only girl, I existed in my own world, so to say, which I loved very much because I was just allowed 'to be'. Growing up with my brothers was fun, as we enjoyed playing together. Back then, we had no mobile phones or PlayStation, so our carefree activities consisted of running

around, skipping and the boys flew their kites. Sometimes we forgot to eat, until we were called in by the minder.

I am writing this to share what it was like growing up in

a big family, the roles my parents carried out, and how that has shaped me. My parents, regular civil workers, worked hard five days of the week to provide for us and to instil in us the importance of certain life values, like getting a school education and obeying our elders. I remember clearly how I always looked forward to evenings when mama would read a book to us; it was the best time for me and my brothers. My father used to sit in his chair and listen, too, but I think he was also keeping a watchful eye on us not to interrupt mama.

When I reflect on how my brothers and I were parented, I know that what our parents gave to us was a gift. I call it a gift because their parenting has left me with beautiful memories that I still cherish. One of the most beautiful memories I have is always being told, 'Be happy with what you have and do not wish for what others have.'

My parents instilled in us a sense of self-discipline and contentment. Of course, we were a regular family and, as such, some days were challenging, but our parents always made us feel that we mattered. They gave us a wonderful base in life regarding how to live respectfully with others. That way of growing up made me enjoy being parented.

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Passing my gifts on to my child

I didn't realise it then, but my parents were actually taking on mentorship roles in their relationships with their children. Having lived much longer lives than we had, they could share with us what they said had been passed on by their parents too, especially respect for one another.

One practice I distinctly remember my dad doing was to inspect the kitchen before he went to bed, to check whether his children had done their chores well. My father made it known to us that no dishes were ever to be left unwashed in his house! After supper, my mother made us pick up and take everything to the kitchen to be washed up. I have kept up that practice of not leaving dishes unwashed for the next morning, a gift I received from my parents.

I am honoured to be a mother, now, to a wonderful young man, Skhumbuzo. In my own parenting, I keep striving to give to my son that which was given to me by my parents, passing on the life virtues they believed in and instilled in us. I strongly believe that those regular words of wisdom from my parents to me then are still speaking to me now. I am a single parent and, in my opinion, where possible, a child should and must be raised by more than one parent. But my own foundation, built when I was being parented, has made it more possible for me to do this job on my own.

Instead of writing about my parenting, I decided to ask my son regarding his thoughts about how I have raised him – the highs, lows, and memorable moments that he would like to share. To make it comfortable for him, we agreed that he could record himself and email me the recording. On the next page is the transcription of the audio I received.



Elaine's son, Skhumbuzo Butler Dube



AUDIO RECORDING BY SKHUMBUZO BUTLER DUBE

'This is Skhumbuzo Butler Dube. I have been asked to give my opinion of how I think Elaine Maane, my loving mother, raised me. Where do I start? I guess with me being raised by a single parent. From what I have gathered from a lot of friends and acquaintances, people I have come into contact with who've been raised by single parents, most of them say they have had a very difficult upbringing, that it was tough to relate and to actually show emotion to your parent, and so on.

For me, I can say it was slightly different. Yes, the beginning of my childhood was a bit hectic, losing my father at a very young age, and my mom being very young at the same time. As well as trying to find herself, she was also a parent at such a young age. Yeah, I can imagine it must have been very difficult for her. In the beginning we did have some tough times, but later on in life, things just got better and better.

So, for me, how my mom has impacted on my life is at my general core. My beliefs, my ethos, stem solely from my upbringing and how my mom raised me and wanted me to be as a person in this world. She told me to always be caring, loving, to put myself first, to believe in myself, and that there will always be people who will have negative things to say about you. But to always focus and believe in myself. I know a lot of people have struggled or struggle with that, but for me, from a very, very young age, I was always told to believe in myself, so that's something which I look back on, and I say, wow! It sounded silly back then, but I am glad it was instilled.

Memorable moments, wow! I think if my memory serves me correctly, from when I was about 12 or 13, my mom started working at the company where she's still working for now, STEPS. The position involved a lot of travelling within Africa, South Africa, and abroad. And if I am not mistaken, I remember my mom saying something like this:

'Butler, you are my son, I love you and you are my everything. I have taken this job so that I can take you to the good school that you are going to (that was Wynberg Boys' High), and as much as I am not going to be here, because my work is going to require a lot of time, this is when you are going to develop to be a better man. The decisions you make now about how you do things and who you choose to surround yourself with will have a dominant effect in your life later.'

It took me a while to understand that, but later on in life my mom's words made sense: from a young age, decisions you make have an effect that might not happen immediately, but later on in life. And from a young age, it is important, of course, to make mistakes, but it's also important to think analytically before we make decisions, such as doing this and continuing with that.

I think I was around 12 or 13 years of age, and we were living in a two- or three-bedroom house in Retreat and my mom would be travelling away for three weeks or so. And the 13-year-old kid that I was, I lived at home alone, feeding myself, preparing my own lunch, doing everything for myself. So, from a young age, I have learnt the importance of looking after oneself, and being comfortable with oneself.

The highs – my mom has been my biggest supporter throughout my life. Even when I have made the worst of decisions, my mom has always had my back. She has always been there to give me a hug, show me some support. So, yeah, definitely the highs would be that my mom has always been my biggest supporter.

The lows – I wouldn't say there aren't any. I guess when it comes to certain things like my passions, and stuff, I can remember at school, my mom came to watch me play rugby once. She came with a friend, and she watched me play a whole match and then afterwards asked me what position I played – hilarious! And that was just when she had taken a bit more interest in my passion, but other than that, yeah, phenomenal she was as a woman, and still is.'

Changing lives is a gift

I know that knowledge is vital, and I am a firm believer that knowledge is like water, therefore it should be shared. In my line of work, part of my responsibilities is to provide ongoing mentorship to young people. Many of these young people at times find themselves with no clear direction in life. Through regional partner networks with STEPS (the organisation that I am part of), they receive training as facilitators. Initially, most of them are so afraid to even stand and say their own name out loud. However, with continued mentorship, via digital platforms such as WhatsApp, these young people have grown to become leaders in their own communities.

During my most recent webinar with a group of young female facilitators in Salima, Malawi, one of them said, 'I am happy because we last saw each other a long time ago, but now it seems things are going well because we are able to see each other, regardless of Corona. I am very happy to see us again as it has been very long. I also was sad because you were not able to come and see me physically, as I wanted you to see how confident I have become, I am stronger now and your coming changed my life. I used to be very shy to speak up among others, but now I am a totally different person. Today I will tell my mother that I communicated with you on a Zoom meeting, and it is my first time. I wanted you to see the changes in me, my appearance, and that I speak openly in my facilitation among others, and for that I am very thankful.'

I feel grounded and happy with the foundation I got from my parents. I am able to pass that on to my son, as well as to the many young people with whom I cross paths. Changing lives is a gift. All I have, in and around me, is gratitude.

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KARATE COACH AND PARENT

Richard Kloosman

I met my wife about two or three years after I started doing karate; in fact I invited her to my brown belt grading. This she did not appreciate at all. She thought that those who did the grading were crazy to fight so hard with people who were so tired – the tired ones were me and my friends.

After I got married and had settled into married life, I stopped all my sport, even soccer. I was out of sport for about six years or so and became very unfit. But soon after the birth of my third son, I became reacquainted with Sensei Neil, and took part as his student in a friendly karate tournament. I remember my wife and three sons being at the tournament, the youngest still a baby and the oldest about three or four years old. I remember the female students of the other sensei, Dean Sias, hanging around my last born, like girls always do.

As it turned out, my sons would grow up with their dad practising karate. As I started to make karate my sport of habit, I would take them along to the dojo (place of training) and they would watch me practise. From time to time, they would come on the floor and practise with me. The youngest was too young to train, but he used to come onto the floor wearing his Spiderman suit. Sensei Neil thought this was hilarious. My sons never became students in Sensei Neil's dojo though, because by the time I went to black belt they were old enough to join my club.

Being a sensei and a dad

I always had it in the back of my mind that I would be a real father to my sons, and not an absent father. While I was growing up, there was a time that my father and I were very close. He took me everywhere with him. But for some reason this changed, and it seemed to me – a young boy, just about to go into his teenage stage – that he suddenly did not love me anymore. Sometimes children experience things very differently than adults perceive they would. I am sure that my father's intention was never to hurt us, but hurt me he did. Whether my father knew it or not, I felt abandoned by him, and this left a scar that I did not recognise until I was well into my thirties. From when I was a young man, I wanted to have children of my own and I wanted to have sons, which I got. But I was determined never to abandon them as I had felt abandoned.

I recall some of the stories my father told us about his upbringing, and from what he said, his father was not the easiest man to live with. What was wonderful about my dad and our relationship, was that towards the end of his life we came to an understanding and an acceptance – we knew that things had been done and said that were not worth bringing up. My dad saw my firstborn son and unfortunately died of cancer months later. In the end, what I was most angry about was that he could not live longer. As strange as it may sound, as much as I was sad during the time of his death, I truly was as angry at him for dying at that time. I think many might understand what I mean.

Being both a father and sensei was a very interesting state of affairs. One day as I stood before my class in my own karate





Richard with his sons Joshua, Liam and Ryan

school, my sons standing before me, I realised that I would have a double impact on their lives. I would be sensei in the dojo, and dad at home. These two roles, I had to balance. This dual role played out very well, looking back. I got to mentor my sons from two angles. How they felt about this was unknown to me, of course. My wife always said that I should not force them to go to karate just because I was the sensei as well as their father. But my idea was that the time would come for them to decide, but while they were small they did not have a choice. When Wednesday or Friday came, they just had to climb into the car, and we were off to karate. I do not think that they ever thought there was a choice; it was like going to school. I knew though that the time would come that these boys perhaps would think that they want to do something else with their time, but that was still in the future. In the meantime, there were competitions and gradings, and they won a couple of dojo prizes for their talent.

I told my sons that they had to get who I am right in their minds; when it came to the dojo, I insisted that they should call me Sensei and not Dad. I explained that in a sense they were not my sons in the dojo but my students, which meant no privileges or favours. This they sort of understood and we took it from there. They were almost always the seniors in the class. When I had to discipline the class, the seniors got disciplined first and this made things a bit easier to manage. What I got out of the whole situation was that I was able to see my sons much more than most fathers would. I would be next to the rugby field, the athletics field, the cricket field, the hockey field, the school stage, and then teach them in the dojo as well. What a privilege I had!



Spending time

I need to say, before anyone who reads this feels bad about not having that sort of time to spend with their children, I always worked five minutes away from my sons' primary and secondary schools. Not everybody can be blessed like I was. In fact, what was true for me, was just the opposite for my wife. She could not be where I could be as our children grew up.

Spending time with your children should be planned and the child should know exactly when you can or cannot be there. They need to understand that life circumstances are not the same for everyone. But as a parent you should honour your promises, even if they are going to cost you time and effort. The time to be present in your children's lives decreases rapidly as they grow older, and the time you think you will have to spend with them will be gone before you know it. At some stage, they will not want to spend time with you; they will be teenagers or adults and will have different priorities that do not include their parents. If you do not make time for them when they are young, the time will be lost – there is nothing you can do about it. That is life.

What my sons said

I wanted to know what my boys got out of doing karate, so I asked each of them to respond to the following questions:

- What is your earliest memory of karate?
- What stood out at the karate club as you remember it?
- What do you remember about gradings and competitions?
- What was it like to be the son of the sensei?
- What was the hardest thing about being in the karate class?
- What is your overall feeling now about karate?

Ryan – the Spiderman suit boy

Ryan is my youngest son. Although he could not start right at the beginning when I established my club, he usually went with us. He is 18 years old now, and this is what he had to say about his time in the dojo:

'At Rusthof [primary school] I remember watching you teach karate and not being able to participate because I was too young. [I also remember] when I was at a red belt grading. I cannot remember what happened at the grading as such, I just remember that grading happening at Sensei Neil's club.

'[I remember] when we fought and [were] sitting in the circle [whenever I asked the students to sit in a circle, they knew it was time for some kumite].⁵

The discipline in the class stood out. I could not just do what I wanted to do. The time in the dojo also taught me discipline and to be a leader, and I had to show leadership in the dojo as I became a higher belt. Another thing I learnt through the karate was that you needed to work hard if you wanted to reach a goal or belt.

'The gradings were always nice, you could measure yourself against others. The *snoepie* [the tuckshop outside the hall where the grading took place] was nice, I always looked forward to buying something there. Then when we finished our grading sessions, I could go play outside in the school courtyard next to the tuckshop with the other lower belts. Brown belt was more serious, we prepared right up to the start of the grading to make sure we remembered the katas.⁶

5 Kumite is the part of karate training in which a person trains against an adversary.

6 A kata is a detailed pattern of movement done in karate.



‘Competitions were one of the most enjoyable parts of doing karate. It was nice to fight against the other people as opposed to just fighting against your fellow students. I can remember in my first competition getting a silver medal. I also remember that we usually picked up students who did not have transport and they went with us to the competition. Once we went through and everyone was in the back of a bakkie. I remember the ceremonies we had, they were nice, and we also got participation medals at certain competitions.

‘It was very different because you treated us all the same in class. We had the advantage of going home with the sensei, though if we wanted to ask questions of the sensei in the class there were no difference in the way you treated us.

‘The hardest thing was when we got better, the pressure, [because] I had to be a leader. I could not be a friend in the class, I had to be a leader. After a while, me and the other students in the class were not so close, it became not so nice to go to karate. I cannot really remember when and what made it hard to go to karate anymore. I stopped because all the sport [school sports] became too much. Mom also added to the idea that I should focus more on school things.

‘I would like to go back to karate, maybe sometime after I finish school.’

Liam – the rugby boy

Liam is my middle son. He started karate at the time the dojo opened. Very talented in sports, as all my sons are, he could pick up moves easily, which made him well suited for kata, especially. Liam is 20 years old now and here is what he had to say concerning his years in the club:

‘I remember when we went to Sensei Neil’s dojo when dad was brown belt. Then I remember the time we went for red belt, we received head bands from Sensei Neil on which

was the Seiki Kan logo. My earliest remembrance of our club was when we were at Rusthof Primary School. I remember us having a child there who always hit harder than he should have, being bigger than us.

‘There was always discipline and we had to concentrate on what we did all the time. There was an expectation of excellence [and training] until you were satisfied with our performance. You were into making leaders and not only teaching karate. The fighting was always very nice, though.

‘The gradings were always long for me for some reason, and I always remember that we were strict on who could grade, not everyone was guaranteed they would grade. You did not hand out grades to students, we were strict on the quality of the student before they could grade. I remember [our club] winning most of the fighting and kata awards when we graded. Our club was also more disciplined during gradings than the students of Sensei Neil.

‘I think I remember three or four competitions. Me, Joshua and Jon-Antohein were in the same group; we came first, second and third. I beat John Antohein to get into the finals, and Josh beat someone else. Joshua and I met in the finals and I beat Joshua. In the next one we all received participation medals and I remember that the South African team was also there.

‘It was no different being the son of the sensei. I felt like any other student, there was no bias. We were always the seniors because we started when the dojo opened. I remember you being stricter on us, on the whole. What I wondered at times, if I was naughty in the class, was whether there would be consequences for me when we got home! I think we also got the most push-ups to do, amongst other things.

‘For me the hardest thing was performing the katas in front of the class, I was always nervous. I was out of my comfort



zone because about 20 to 30 children were following what I was doing. The problem was also the embarrassment when I forgot a move in the kata in front of the class. The thing is that it helped me being comfortable in front of people today. I also believe that because I was taken out of my comfort zone so early in life it helped me in my rugby, with my leadership role in all the teams that I played for.

'I was also captain of many of my teams, as well as vice-captain, except for the Western Province teams, and the leadership I learnt in karate was very useful in those roles. I never really lost interest in karate, but when I went to high school in Paarl and then Cape Town I could no longer do it. One of the troubles with karate was when we got better, the competitions got less, which lessened my interest. If there had been more competitions, I would have loved to have gotten colours in karate. If my rugby did not take all of my time, I would love to still be doing it.

'I feel karate helped me in my rugby. I was small in rugby, so this helped me with confidence. I would love to come back to it. One thing I must say is karate was also a constant in my life, and it set my week for me.'

Joshua – the black belt boy

Joshua is my oldest son. He started when the club started and he is also the only son still in the club. He is my most senior student and also became my first black belt in the club. Although it was not easy for him to remain in the club, he is still there. Joshua is 21 years old now and here are his thoughts:

'My earliest remembrance of karate was when we were in class at Sensei Neil's club. After that I remember us (Me, Liam and Ryan) being at Rusthof Primary School with students like Sylvano, Jon Antohein, and a girl that I cannot remember. I remember my first grading for red belt. We ate hot dogs that

day. It was very cold, our feet were numb, and I was excited for the first grading.

'I remember that karate was always on a Tuesday and Thursday. We made new friends and became friends with our fellow students. I remember some of the first things we learnt were to block and make some attacks. There was always that short time right before the class would start, [when] we were catching up with our karate friends. You were always very strict at the club; we never had time to make some fun with a teammate next to us.

'What always stood out for me was the number of people at the gradings. I also saw friends from school there. The gradings were also challenging; Sensei Neil made them challenging. He would ask us things we would not know to catch us out and to see how we would fare doing them. I also liked the fighting with the other kids from his club.

'My black belt grading was unexpected. I had to do Seiunshin [kata], I remember being the only one who did the kata that day. I did the kata the first time and got confused in the performance, so I asked to do it again and then I did it correctly. I also had to fight the black belts when it was time for kumite.

'I remember when I went to my first competition and that all the fighters in the club won medals for the club. I lost to Liam in the final of our age group. We were once at the Western Cape Sports School, that was a big competition. We got participation medals there for the first time. The fights were a lot harder. I remember the different types of styles and clothing they wore before we started with the fights. We always got home late from the competitions, sometimes after eight, having started at nine in the morning. It was there where we had to adjust to referees who were not always impartial, though I did very well.



‘Being the son of the sensei, I felt that we always had to be the best at all things in the club. What was also interesting was the authority we had in the club. We were put into leadership very early.

‘Sometimes I felt that we were forced to be there. Then after a while, we did not feel challenged because it was not as nice as it was before, when everything was new, and we learnt new things constantly. At the moment being able to teach in the club is a big honour, but before [that] it became a burden to be there, because [of being] the highest belt and nothing new was forthcoming. We could not see the bigger picture yet.

‘It is a sport, but very different; you have to concentrate all the time. The higher you go, the more dangerous it becomes for your opponent who attacks you. It is like a craft, and you can become very good in it. What I also like about it is that you can literally do it forever. You can also never perfect it; there is always a learning curve. This is not necessarily the case in other sports. What I like now is the parents coming into the club, wanting to add value. Their expertise and assistance to the club allow it to grow further.’

Becoming a father

I became a father at the age of 28 years, four years after my wife and I got married. Unfortunately, we had the experience of a miscarriage about a year earlier, something that touched both my wife and I very deeply. We believe that our child is with God now, and we will see him or her one day.

I do not know about many other men’s experiences of becoming a father, as it seems we do not often speak to one another in this regard. But I had the privilege of being present in the room at the birth of my first son, where I actually helped the doctor a bit, and also with my third son. The first



Joshua receiving his black belt

was a natural birth and I could not believe the strength and determination my wife had to give birth. The last one was a caesarean, in which I had to see how my wife was cut open. My middle son’s birth was a bit of drama, and I was not allowed to be in the room because of complications during the birth. Childbirth is one of those experiences that, when you look back, you wonder why you can ever get mad at your wife again after she has gone through such pain for both of you to have children. Although I had seen a lot of things in my life, I was still not ready for any of those experiences. I do not think that any person could ever be prepared for what transpires during the birth of a child.

My first son was born with his eyes closed, and as the doctor had to finish his procedures, and no nurse was on hand, he gave my son to me to hold. As I held him, he opened his eyes, and so I was the first person that he saw. The feeling was like people always say, surreal. It felt as



though I already knew him, even though he was brand new. I do not want to say that having children is a burden, because it is not, but what I felt then was sort of a burden, not because of having to care for my child – it was deeper than that. For I knew that this tiny baby was relying on me and his mother to become the person he was destined to become. I could never walk out of his life; what was he going to do if I did not fulfil my role? Of course, in a sense I was also ready to care for my children, come what may, because of the decision I had made as a young man not ever to let my children feel that I do not care for or love them.

Not many people get the opportunities I had to father and mentor my boys from two different angles. So how am I a father to my children? Here we need to recognise that there are different parenting styles, and that what is proper and necessary for one parent, may be too lax or too strict for another. I find that some parents really get upset if their children get corrected by a stranger; likewise, young people

do not accept criticism from their seniors. I once had a run in with a young lady who was using profanity in the street. I gave her a strong rebuke and, with total disregard for the age difference between us, she replied that I could not tell her what to do. The idea that ‘it takes a village to raise a child’ is long gone.

‘Good’ and ‘bad’ parenting – from a father’s point of view

What does it mean to be a father to a child? Understanding this task at first seemed easy to me, because I just had to avoid doing the same as my father did. But life is not that straightforward. I do not believe that people plan to be bad parents. Sometimes personality traits mean that if they do not work on their parenting, the consequences are tragic for the child. Sometimes ‘life happens’: they start out right, but then make mistakes, and their children suffer to varying degrees. What makes ‘bad’ parents is a discussion I am not willing to go into, as a person can sound too judgemental in such discussions, and we never have all the facts, either.

There are obviously good and bad ways to rear a child, but I believe my parenting style and philosophy of child rearing cannot be reduced to a formula that can be compared to someone else’s formula. The way I brought up my children is in no way unique but will be frowned upon as not politically correct in the current social climate. Corporal punishment, clear gender identification, strong grounding in Bible absolutes, and insistence that truth is not a relative concept are not currently in vogue; but in spite of this, all my children are well-adjusted young adults, and I judge that the way I brought up my children was very good. They understand that there are people who see life differently and that some live within very wide boundaries. They know that they



Richard and Joshua

need to decide whether they will follow the pattern of their upbringing or not.

As my sons are more exposed to a more socially or politically 'correct' world, they need to relate to it as well as develop a resilience against a new social intolerance, where if you do not agree with all sorts of humanistic views (that exclude religious or biblical absolutes), you are seen to be intolerant. It seems that we have gone from religious authoritarianism to humanistic authoritarianism. And this is where we fail as parents: we indoctrinate our children on the one side and give no firm boundaries on the other. This will not work if we want well-rounded individuals.

One of the ways I took control of the upbringing of my children was to direct how others worked with them. For example, when I took my children to crèche for the first time, I insisted that only Afrikaans should be spoken to them. I wanted them to learn Afrikaans, the language of our heritage, and I also believe that children are smart enough to learn two languages. Once I was confronted by someone who had heard about my approach to learning Afrikaans. She argued that English was 'the language of the future'. I always think of what would happen to all our beautiful cultures and languages if the world should really believe that? Now, I am not speaking against those who grew up speaking one language but who choose to bring up their children speaking another – but in my estimation, well-rounded individuals should be exposed to more options, not fewer.

Another time one of my son's teachers called me to a meeting concerning my son's behaviour and the fact that he had a tendency not to sit still for long and concentrate in class. The meeting included a therapist, who suggested that I should consider putting my son on Ritalin, a drug prescribed for children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder

(ADHD). This I vehemently rejected. My words were, 'My sons will not be pacified by drugs, as if they have no self-control.' The others in the room immediately apologised and said that it was not meant in that way. The subject was not raised with me again and the issue also went away, somehow.

Of course, I had a talk to my son concerning him disrupting class, and I made the consequences for bad behaviour clear. I remember that I did not allow that same son to play rugby for the school for one match because of behavioural issues. The coach called me, pleading that I allow my son to play the match – he could sit out another match, but please not the current one. So, I put pressure on my son, asking him, 'What are we going to do now?'

He knew the consequences of not behaving and that he had caused this dilemma. My children know that all actions, good or bad, have consequences. They know hard work brings success; also, success cannot be measured in monetary wealth and their lives should be about how they can help people. If children do not feel a responsibility to their fellow human beings, what are we teaching them?

I was never timid about speaking about real-life issues with my children from when they were young. I find it strange that parents do not speak to children about issues

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like the purpose and meaning of life or about what love is. They are deep issues to be sure, but should our children learn about life from strangers or the television?

I teach my children to reject ‘political correctness’, but I also teach them how to disagree respectfully with people. Even if our pastor teaches something that is not in the bible, they should respectfully disagree with him. If they have to, they should also disagree with me.

It is very disconcerting when your children disagree with you about things – when you think they are in the wrong, and they feel you are in the wrong. But if that was the way you brought them up, you should not be surprised if they take a stand at some point on something. I remember my two oldest sons wanting to go somewhere, and their mother and I disagreeing with them about that. They were 19 and 20 years old, so we told them, ‘We cannot tell you what to do anymore. We do not want you to go, but you must decide.’ They went. Did they disregard us? I do not think it is that simple, for it was time for them to make up their own minds, and we were not angry because we wanted them to have independence and to take into consideration the consequences that could follow. We humans tend not to want to think about consequences for actions; we just hope our actions work out, even when very questionable. In their case no harm was done, but hopefully their decision-making improved through the process.

What seems obvious to me now is that our parenting is informed by our upbringing, socio-economic circumstances, experiences, planning, and determination to see that planning through. I always planned to have children, and I believe that has put me in a better place to be a good parent than a person who did not plan to have children and who is therefore unsure what to do with the children they bring

into the world. My children have always been welcome in our house. I have spoken to people who told heart-breaking stories about their parents making them feel unwelcome for as long as they can remember, and the feeling of rejection was still clear in their voices. If we men want to be good fathers, we must be certain about wanting to be parents. That is not a rebuke to anyone, but a strong caution. I believe that children, even from inside the womb, feel what their parents feel towards them. I understand that there is also scientific proof to support this belief, but that is not for our discussion here.

Parenting as a couple

What I have written about parenting from a male point of view is by no means a full description of parenting. In fact, I believe that my parenting role will only stop the day I die, and I am still learning the ropes. I regularly visit my mother and she still parents me, even though I am almost 50 years old. Like the great Ravi Zacharias (1946–2020)⁷ said, ‘You never stop needing your parents,’ and I appreciate her still attending to my various needs as a son. I am not sure what I will do when she is no longer there. I get comfort from knowing that she is there in her house, praying for me and my wife and our children, and for everyone.

Children come into the world from a mother and a father and, whether the child is male or female, in my view they need parenting from both sides to be well-balanced individuals. I am not saying that children who grow up in single-parent homes cannot be well balanced, but I believe that single-parent homes are not ideal. Just as we need the male perspective of life, we need the female perspective also, because each sex experiences life differently. Intellectually, humans know that there are differences between the sexes, and we are taught this from the earliest years, but it still does not prepare us to

7 Ravi Zacharias was a Christian Apologist.



live with the opposite sex in a permanent situation. Having been married for almost 24 years now, I am still amazed at how my wife and I see the very same situation differently. When children grow up seeing that Mom has her views and Dad has his views and, somehow, they work things out for the best for the family, it shows them that there are many more options to consider.

Of course, there are many family types and situations that parents find themselves in, but I can only relate my own situation – and I cannot speak about raising children without including the mother of my own children and describing some of the differences in how we approached parenting and how that brings a balance to the family. For example, besides the fact that women are at times the ‘softer’ parent and men the ‘harder’ in terms of discipline, from my experience I think women are also more lenient with their sons. When I wanted to discipline one of my sons, to teach him a lesson, my wife would often say, ‘Do not be so hard, give him one more chance.’ On the other hand, compared to me, my wife is much more straightforward and to the point about a topic like ‘the birds and the bees’, so that we often feel slightly embarrassed after she has spoken. In that regard, she is much more effective than me. But when it comes to understanding relationships between the sexes, my wife and I speak the same language. I cannot stand a womaniser, and from the start, when my sons showed an interest in young ladies, I took them aside and told them that I will not tolerate them having a relationship with more than one girl at the same time, and that they will not treat them like objects.

In some instances, our family dynamics have hinged on the attitude of my wife and how she saw her family develop. Once, we had to take a hard decision about whether I should stay at a place where I had worked for 12 years, or whether I should

start at a new place with a reduced salary but where I would prefer to work. My children were too young then to know what was happening, but my wife wholeheartedly supported me in moving to the new place. This gave me such confidence and it meant that I could do my best for the community I started to work with. Then came a second time, when again I had to choose between going back to a ‘normal job’ and working with prisoners. My wife again supported my preference, which was to choose the road less followed – even though we could not be certain whether it would be a good use of my time, knowing that we were not getting any younger. However, this time around, it was a family decision and she backed me in front of my children. In this way, she taught our children that our family is not motivated by money and working where we can get the highest salary, but that we work for fulfilment and we believe that, with God, we will make right decisions.

Parenting cannot be based on a formula or specific techniques; it is an experience that you live out before your children. A wife and husband live life in front of their children and the children learn from them. I once spoke with a man who was very upset that his daughter had started to smoke, yet he had been a smoker all his life, and I could not understand his reasoning. He was the one who set the standards in the house. If you want to impact your children positively, parenting is not ‘I say and you do’, but rather ‘I model and you can follow’. This is a harder way of living life, for sure, but not impossible.

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A strong foundation

In the end, parenting requires us to sacrifice our lives for our children. I once made a speech at a wedding where I told the bridegroom that his life had changed; he could no longer be the young man he had been, he was a husband now. His friends should come a distant second to his wife and children – in fact, his friends should make appointments to see him. If his whole life did not become a foundation for his family, then the marriage would be in trouble. A husband cannot live with a wife and children while pursuing agendas that break down his family structure; this is common sense. How could any man or woman marry without fundamentally changing their life for the other, to accommodate the other? Divorces happen not because of the failure of the institution of marriage, but because people who do not intend to live a

married life get married. Parenting is built on the strength of a man and a woman committing to one another first, then jointly committing to their family. With this foundation in place, we should hopefully see well-balanced children.

A person's life is built upon foundations and structures. For me, my foundation is Jesus Christ and his life's accomplishments, which are transcendent. My wife is the biggest pillar in my life, next to God. And then come the people who built me up and challenged me. I cannot take all the credit for the good decisions I have made and for developing a positive outlook on life. Therefore, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all who have influenced me to become the person I became, who consciously took time to be my friend, or to assist, coach, mentor or pastor me.



The Kloosman family





FAMILY LIFE

Nic Fine

My father, Azriel Fine (1921–2006)

There is no doubt that, through their presence or their absence, fathers have a great influence on their children. I was fortunate to have a loving father who was very present in my life. Like so many men and women of his generation, Azriel Fine lived through a devastating war and subsequent peace, the birth and the death of apartheid, the first step of humankind on the moon, as well as incredible and at times bewildering advances in technology.



Azriel Fine

Let go and move on, or keep a memory alive?

A long while back, my father told me a story that made a lasting impression. The story involved a heated discussion between him and my uncle; but before I share it, let me introduce these two men.

My father was born in Cape Town into a Jewish family. Like many Eastern European Jews, his father and mother had migrated to South Africa from what were then the border regions between Russia, Latvia and Lithuania. His father was a baker who, like many refugees, set up his own business soon after arriving in Cape Town. My grandfather, an extremely hardworking man, passed away when my father was still a teenager of about 15 years old.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, my dad enlisted in the South African Navy. He was straight out of school and underage for military service; not yet 18. He must have lied about his age as he was so determined to join up and participate in the war effort. Shortly after enlisting he was seconded with many other young South African sailors to the British Royal Navy. He served for about four years in the Mediterranean on the HMS Nelson, survived many submarine and aircraft attacks, and experienced the loss of several of his mates.

My father never really talked about his time during the Second World War. He never spoke about the devastation caused by the Nazis bombing the city of London, and he was silent about his memories of the pain and suffering of those in the European concentration camps, of families forever torn apart and displaced. As a young boy I was very keen to hear all my father's war stories, but I gathered from his silence that it was difficult for him to describe his experiences, and that his trauma was best left buried in the past. I think my father's silence on this influential part of his life helped shape my



appreciation of the horrors of armed conflict. I experienced my father's silence as a story in itself. When my turn came to fight in a war that I certainly didn't believe in, I was very clear that this was not an option for me. I was prepared to leave my country, my family and my work – to make these sacrifices, in order not to serve with the SADF in the Angolan conflict.

At the end of the war in 1945, my father, with no apparent skills and no tertiary education, had to make his own way in the world. Given his recent experience of fighting against Nazism, he was always opposed to the racial policies of the

National Party government of the day, but like most white South Africans at the time, he believed the political prisoners on Robben Island were justifiably interned as they believed in violent revolution, something he was opposed to.

My uncle, my mother's brother, also grew up in a Cape Town Jewish family who had their roots in Eastern Europe.

My uncle remembers his father

describing how he, together with friends, had started their own golf club in Cape Town. This was because, at the time, Jewish members either were not allowed or were not made welcome at other golf clubs. Because of their experience of being excluded as Jews, my grandfather and his friends pledged that this club would be open to all regardless of religion, social background or race. With his own father's experience of exclusion still a clear memory, my uncle himself also experienced prejudice on a very personal level, which helped shape his view of the world.

I also realised that letting go and moving on, and keeping a memory alive, need not be mutually exclusive.

My uncle was a successful and competitive sportsman and played for his school's rugby 1st XV. When it was announced that his team would be undertaking a rugby tour to Zimbabwe (Rhodesia at that time), the news was greeted with much enthusiasm and excitement from all the team members. A few weeks before their departure, the headmaster called my uncle to his office and informed him that he would not be included in the touring party. The headmaster explained that the Rhodesian schools they were scheduled to play against would be extremely uncomfortable hosting a Jewish member of the team. He didn't want to embarrass the schools and felt it was best for all concerned if my uncle were to remain at home. This experience of rejection and prejudice, and the extreme disappointment my uncle must have felt not being able to travel with his teammates, helps to explain the stance he took later in life.

We jump forward to the mid-1990s, just after Nelson Mandela's release from prison and his election as President. A great mutual friend invited my uncle and father and their wives to his daughter's wedding. The chosen wedding venue was an exclusive and private sports and entertainment club in Cape Town, which, for most of its existence, had been closed to any Jewish membership. People of colour had also not been welcome. It had a reputation for being a colonial haven for white, English speaking members. That all changed with the new dispensation during the 90s.

My father and uncle hotly debated whether or not to attend this function. My uncle's view was that, because of the club's history of exclusion and prejudice, he would never set foot inside its premises. My father, on the other hand, was deeply moved and influenced by the behaviour of Nelson Mandela who, despite being kept incarcerated for so long, showed a willingness to reconcile with, forgive,

and reach out to white South Africans. My father had the view that, if Mandela could attend places and functions that had previously excluded him, he could too. He saw the 1995 Rugby World Cup as a great example of this ability to let go and move on for the benefit of all.

So, to conclude this saga, the two men – who had great respect for one another – agreed to disagree. My father and mother attended the wedding, and my uncle and aunt did not.

This story made me realise how deeply entrenched racial prejudice was, not only here in South Africa, but across the world. I saw that the hurt and humiliation caused by prejudice can live on, passed from one generation to another. I also realised that letting go and moving on, and keeping a memory alive, need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, given the experience of the holocaust in Europe, and of apartheid in South Africa, both actions are vitally important. I believe we cannot move forward as a nation if we do not reconcile and let go of all the hurt and pain of the past. And, ensuring that we tell future generations of the impact of the holocaust and apartheid is equally important, so that these atrocities are never repeated. So, on reflection, I respected and understood both my father's and my uncle's positions.

Becoming independent

My dad's sister married a Hollander whose family escaped from Amsterdam to South Africa before the Nazis invaded the Netherlands; nearly all the family who remained there did not survive. My uncle did his undergraduate medical studies in Cape Town and went with my aunt to complete his studies in the UK. He graduated as a doctor as the Second World War was declared, and was seconded to a hospital in London. For my homesick father, who was serving in the Mediterranean, this was a huge bonus, as he now had family to visit when he had a few days of leave.

My father was determined to be able to afford to travel from the naval dockyards in the south of England up to London, and to have some leftover cash in his pocket for treats. As tradition would have it, each day on board ship every sailor was given a tot of rum with the evening meal. My dad was never a great spirits drinker, and he guessed there might be an opportunity to pass on his daily tot to other keen sailors for a modest fee. And this he did. After several weeks at sea, he made enough money from selling his daily tot to ensure that he always had enough funds to travel to his sister in London and could be independent while there. Throughout his life, my dad continued to take good care of his personal finances. He never got into debt and was always able to assist other family members and friends who fell on hard times. Indeed, this is a characteristic he passed on to me. But for my dad, building up resources and being independent started with a tot of rum!

Being honest; or not?

My father told me a story about his father, the grandfather I never got to meet. At the end of each working day his dad always hung up his waistcoat on the corner post of his bed. Inside the top right-hand pocket of this waistcoat, the old man kept all his pennies and coins. Each week my father was sent to take his pocket money out of the pocket of coins (this was a tickey – a threepenny coin – in the days before rands and cents). My dad always wondered if his dad knew exactly how many coins were in his pocket; maybe he could take a chance and nab a few extra pennies and the old man would not notice! But then he felt ashamed by this idea because his dad trusted him to take just the right amount. Being trusted by his father in this way meant a lot to him, and he wanted to live up to the honour. He always wondered why his dad sent him off to collect the pocket money, rather than giving it to



him. He interpreted this as a personal test of his honesty and discipline, and so, even though he was mightily tempted, he always stuck to the agreement of only taking that one ticky each week.

Sometimes in our lives we have to walk our own walk, despite what others want from us. There were certainly occasions in my life when I had to make choices that were contrary to my parents' wishes. At such times I reminded myself of the following story told to me by my father.

Sometimes in our lives we have to walk our own walk, despite what others want from us.

My grandfather, who was very much part of the local Jewish community in Cape Town, was never able to attend the Saturday morning Sabbath service at the local synagogue. He managed a bakery and his day began well before dawn to enable him to deliver fresh bread to the shops and markets by daybreak. He instructed his two sons

to represent him each Saturday morning in synagogue and always assumed that they did so.

My dad and his older brother were both passionate sportsmen and represented their school in several team sports. They attended a government school, where all competitive sports were played on Saturday mornings, the Jewish Sabbath. And so, my dad and his brother had a tough choice to make: to attend synagogue as instructed, or to disobey their father and participate with their teams.

Going to play sport without their father knowing was easy as the old man was always at work when they left home. But they needed to carry out the deception without their mother seeing; they did not want to put her in a compromising

position. And so, every weekend they followed a set plan. They packed their sports bags the night before and hid them in the garden. In the morning, they dressed in smart clothes for the morning service, retrieved their sports bags and set off to play, and not to pray!

Learning from our mistakes

One story my dad shared with me carried a lesson I have never forgotten. When he returned from war, he had no qualifications and a job within the family bakery never materialised so he had to fend for himself. He started out as a messenger in a large office, on a very modest salary. He realised that, if he were ever going to have enough money to marry and raise a family, he would have to find other ways to earn. At the time there was much excitement in Cape Town caused by two men who were advertising shares in a new diamond mine that was about to become operational. This sounded to my dad and his pals like an investment opportunity not to be missed. My father, swept up in the possibility of earning a good profit, invested all his savings from his navy pay-out at the end of the war in this scheme.

A few weeks later there appeared a dramatic newspaper headline: 'Conmen flee the country – investors lose out.' Panic set in. It was late on a Friday afternoon, and my father and his friends rushed over to the stock broking firm where they had registered their shares, hoping to quickly cash them in. There was a queue going right around the block and the doors of the stockbrokers had shut. My father was devastated; he had just lost his life savings all in one go.

My father told me that, as terrible as it was at the time, the experience taught him one of the best investment lessons he ever learnt. From then on, he only invested in businesses and industries that he understood. He also always researched the



characters of the people involved and did due diligence on the growth potential of the business. Using these learnings, my father became a successful investor. In an age of fads and opportunities, his advice has stood me in good stead. Get involved in things you understand. Don't rush into anything. Don't get carried away by emotion. Do the appropriate research. And whenever I have made the mistake of rushing into something, or have not done the necessary research, I quickly remind myself of my father's lesson.

Giving our blessings

Most of us accept the theory that when we get older, we are likely to become more conservative in our thinking, more stuck in our ways, less flexible and open to new ways of thinking and doing. Well, my father proved this theory wrong. He proved that instead of shutting down, older age and wisdom can allow for an opening up.

To put this in context, our family set-up provided my dad with several challenges. Both my older sister and younger brother were in same-sex relationships. My sister had shared her life choice with my mother years earlier. My mom, trying to protect my father, had encouraged her not to share this information with him as it would be 'upsetting and hurtful to him'. When my sister eventually disclosed her sexual preference to my father, while disappointed and not happy with it, he seemed to cope with the news. Like many dads, his daughter held a special place in his heart. Also, like many dads, he had a dream of one day having grandchildren and was sad that his only daughter would not be having children of her own. He appreciated her sharing with him because at the time she was one of the few people he could speak to about some tough personal issues he was facing in his own life. This was one of the reasons my sister had the courage

to be open with him. She explained to me: 'I felt that if dad could share intimate and sensitive topics with me, to open up and seek support from me, then I should be able to do the same with him and expect the same understanding from him.'

Years later, after my mother had passed away, my sister celebrated her fiftieth birthday. She and her partner organised a dinner party at their home. My sister wasn't sure if she should invite my dad as he would be one of the few men present in a gathering of predominantly gay women and might feel awkward. Her partner insisted she include him. On the night, when the time came to say a few words and raise a toast to my sister, my father rose to speak. He removed an old letter from his inside pocket and read it aloud. My sister had written it to him when she was a teenager. In it, she was pleading for forgiveness, as she knew she had done wrong and had disappointed him. It was a very sweet letter and had the audience in hysterics. My father continued

to say how he admired and loved his daughter. So much for my sister thinking he would feel awkward and intimidated by the company! I looked around the room and observed that many of the women were deeply moved and had tears rolling down their cheeks. In conversation later that evening, I discovered that many of them had never been blessed and acknowledged in such a way by their own fathers. My father's words to my sister resonated with them and were received as a blessing from an elder to them as well.

I realised that sons and daughters, no matter what age, need to be blessed by a parent or an elder.





Nic with his brother Derrick

I was proud of my dad that night, for being able to do what he did in an unfamiliar environment. I admired the way his words had touched people; I wanted to be able to do that too. I realised that sons and daughters, no matter what age, need to be blessed by a parent or an elder.

My sister's disclosure was difficult for my father to deal with, but my brother Derrick's sharing of his sexuality was even tougher. My father came to see me one day, looking troubled and distressed, and said he would like to discuss my brother's situation with me. He said that he thought my brother's sexuality might be due to his 'bad parenting' or something lacking on his part as a father. I could see that my brother's coming out had challenged him as a man in a way that my sister's choices had not; that it was a masculinity issue between a father and a son. I felt it was good for my dad to let these feelings out to someone. It was not easy to do so within his circle of friends as there was still too much shame,

embarrassment, and fear of judgement present among his generation. I felt that he needed to be acknowledged as a parent and given some clarity about my brother's choices. I told him that my brother had known from a young age that he was attracted to the same sex; it was natural and came from within him, and it had nothing to do with being a 'bad parent'. He had been a great father and was not responsible for my brother's sexuality.

My dad seemed to find the conversation comforting. I realised that parents also need acknowledgement, affirmation and blessings. I also realised that prejudice around difference and diversity is still rife in our communities, and places an unnecessary burden on the family and wider community.

Never too old

After my mother passed away, my father remarried. His new partner challenged him regarding his reluctance to socialise with and accept my brother's partners: 'You have to accept your son or otherwise risk losing him. Is that what you want?' Her wise words shifted him and thankfully he became more accepting of my brother.

Once South Africa's new Constitution had been adopted, and the rights of lesbian and gay South Africans and same sex unions were recognised by law, my brother and his partner decided to get married. The ceremony was held at their home and was conducted by a priest. My brother invited my dad to represent him at the wedding celebration. My father once again came and chatted to me about it. He didn't feel comfortable with the concept of a same-sex marriage and was struggling to accept it. He said he was prepared to attend to support my brother but didn't want to speak. I acknowledged his feelings and suggested that he just prepare a simple, short blessing. He felt he could manage

that. I admired him for being prepared to work through his difficulties and embrace the challenge.

On the day itself, once again my dad surprised me and many others. He spoke about his upbringing in South Africa during the 1920s and later. He had mixed with his own community and was not exposed to much difference. He shared that he was not aware of race issues as a youngster and knew nothing of homosexuality. He related how his own children, with their life choices, had challenged his perceptions, and taught him to be accepting and inclusive, even if it had sometimes been difficult for him. He ended by giving my brother and his partner a warm blessing on their union and wishing them all the best in a loving relationship.

My dad spoke so honestly and openly that day, I was extremely proud. Once again, he moved and influenced many of us gathered there. He showed me that you are never too old to learn, change, grow, and to accept what is.

Buds on the family tree

My dad accepted, with much disappointment, the probability that he would not get grandchildren from either my brother or sister. So, naturally, his attention now turned to me, his last hope in this regard. I was living outside South Africa at the time. I had taken a while to settle into the UK, and the idea of having children was far from top of my list of priorities.

Having Eastern European roots, my dad could get emotional and hot-headed at times. One day he told me, 'I feel, without grandchildren, as if my branch of the family tree is going to wither and die.' I was a bit taken aback when I realised that I was his last chance to get what he wanted – some new buds emerging at the tip of his branch of the family tree. I felt compassion for him and understood his desire, but I also felt irritated by the pressure on me. Surely the

choice to have children should be a very personal decision. After all, as a parent I would be responsible for raising them. It would be lovely to provide him with a grandchild, to give him that pleasure, but I needed to decide if children were what I desired and if I was ready for the responsibility of parenthood. Being in my mid-thirties, I did experience, more and more, the desire to have children of my own and to be a dad. Fortunately, I was with a wonderful woman who became my life-partner and the mother of our two sons.

I will never forget the joy and wonder on my father's face the day he met his first grandchild, my older son. A couple of months after the birth, my dad travelled to the UK to visit us. He entered our kitchen and saw his grandson lying on a large floor cushion. He sank to his knees and stared at the tiny babe, transfixed and thrilled. His dream had finally come true. It was a win-win for both of us. I was overjoyed at the birth of my son and delighted with being a father, and at the same time I could share this with my father and welcome his joy as well.



Nic with sons Dylan and Jacob



Going against tradition

One of the first important decisions my partner and I needed to take together was around circumcision. My partner and I come from different countries and traditions – she was born and raised in an Anglican family in the UK, and I was born and raised in a Jewish family in South Africa. Circumcision for boys forms a strong part of the Jewish tradition, but it did not form any part of my wife's family tradition. My wife was clear she did not want her son circumcised. She didn't subscribe to the claim that tiny babies 'don't feel the pain'. But she respected that this was part of my tradition and said she was prepared to go with what I decided in this regard, even if her personal wish was clear.

Coincidentally, one of our assigned community midwives was Jewish, and when we discussed this dilemma with her, she shared a wonderful book with us – it told the story of a movement amongst Jewish communities of people who were questioning this ancient tradition, this 'covenant with God'. Reading about how other Jewish people experienced going against the tide of tradition was extremely helpful, especially to me. I finally came to my own decision – I didn't feel that strongly about this part of my tradition and didn't want to put my baby boy 'under the knife'. I appreciated the fact that my partner gave me the space to come to this choice for myself, and I was happy that we ended up feeling the same way, both at peace with our decision. We felt that if our son wished to have a circumcision that would be his choice to make later in life – it was his body after all.

As to be expected, this decision to break with tradition was not welcomed within parts of my extended family and community. I realised trouble was brewing the day we introduced our baby son to an uncle and aunt of mine who were visiting from South Africa. While we were all chatting

over a cup of tea, my partner excused herself and took our babe off to change his nappy. I noticed my uncle follow her down the passage and stand behind her, observing the nappy change. I remember thinking this was strange, as men from his generation generally felt that a nappy change was something best avoided. I should have realised that my uncle was doing his civic duty; he wanted to check that my son had been circumcised in the 'proper manner'.

A while later I received a letter from my father (we didn't have computers and email back then). He disclosed that my uncle, on his return home, had come to see him. He asked whether my father knew that his grandson was not circumcised. My dad communicated his embarrassment and shock that this was so, and that the wider family now knew. I replied, explaining that we had made our decision. My dad was so pleased to have a grandson and I think he didn't want the issue around circumcision to damage our relationship. So, it seemed that was the end of it. But, of course, if not openly expressed and talked through, these sorts of things tend to remain hidden just beneath the surface, revealing themselves at a later stage.

And so, many years later, after we had settled in South Africa, and after the birth of our second son (who was also not circumcised), my father eventually expressed his disappointment in me. One day when I was visiting him, he stopped me in the passageway and said, 'My boy, you know I love you very much, but I do feel you are weak. You have been a weak man.' My head was in a spin. I couldn't work out what he was talking about or where this statement came from. I didn't answer at the time, just said 'I am sorry you feel that way' and left it at that, while he offered no further explanation.

When I got home, I shared this incident with my wife. She



immediately summed up the situation perfectly. She felt it had been brewing for some time and had been activated by our second son's birth. She suggested that my dad held her responsible for controlling the decision about our son's non-circumcision, and that he felt I had been weak in not standing up to her. She felt it was time I had an open conversation with him, explaining our process in coming to this decision and that I was not weak – because it's tough going against tradition.

During a family holiday an opportunity arose for this conversation to take place. I invited my dad to have a walk and chat with me. He was pleased to do so. Halfway through our walk we paused and I said I wanted to check something with him; when he called me 'weak' was he referring to the decision my partner and I had made not to circumcise our sons? He replied in the affirmative and added in true Eastern European style, 'Your ancestors – your grandfather and great-grandfather – would be turning in their graves if they knew.' I didn't react to this. I said it was important for me to put the record straight. I told him how my partner hadn't want to circumcise our sons, but had said that the decision was ultimately mine. I told him we had read up on the matter and had finally come to the same decision, but independently. I said that, rather than being weak, I had had to be strong in going against our tradition, knowing that there would be disapproval of my actions. My dad replied that he now understood; he had misread the situation. He agreed that my actions were not a sign of weakness, although he still didn't agree with what I had done. To be fair to my dad, I had never had the courage to have this conversation with him before, so of course he had made his own assumptions.

It is important to tread your own path. You cannot always please your parents and those around you in the life decisions

you make. And to my father's credit, he did accept that his three children had made choices that were different from what he might have wanted. At times he expressed himself forcefully, but thankfully I was resilient enough to withstand that. Ultimately, he was always able to be reasonable when presented with the facts and was able to move on. He never bore a grudge or held on to resentments. My father was a generous and loving man. There is a lot to learn from the way in which he conducted himself.



Nic's dad Azriel (Issy) Fine



My mother, Moyra Fine (1924–1991)

As much as sons are influenced by their fathers, there is no doubt that a mother fills a special place in most men's hearts. My mother was very influential in my life, in a quiet and dignified way. Moyra kept her emotions contained, showing much restraint, never raising her voice. In contrast to my dad (bless him), she never put any pressure on me, always allowed me to walk my own path, and didn't allow her personal desires to get in the way of that. I think that is a great gift to give one's children – the gift of freedom to make their own choices in life – although this freedom was something my mom didn't always have for herself.



Moyra Fine

My mom was the scholar in our family. Our shelves were full of books she had received at school as prizes for academic excellence. She was an avid reader and wanted, above all else, to do an arts degree in English literature. My grandfather was a hard taskmaster, and when the war broke out, he insisted that English literature was a waste of time, and that he would only support my mother at university if she studied 'something useful' like medicine that could contribute to the war effort. My mother had no interest or expertise in the sciences, so she ended up, at her father's insistence, working as a secretary to an army general posted in the Cape. She met my father towards the end of the war while they were both in uniform. He had recently returned to Cape Town after serving in the Mediterranean. They got married young and my mother never got the university education she so desired. However, after raising a family, she started working in a theatre, slowly gathering experience in theatre administration and production. Eventually she became a theatre producer in her own right, selecting scripts and directors, and managing the whole production process. She followed her passion and ended up doing something she loved, even though as a younger woman her dreams were halted.

Given her experience, in her parenting my mother always allowed and encouraged her three children to follow their passions. This is something I have passed on to my two sons. They are both following their own paths with my full support.

Sharing time and experience

I will never forget some of the conversations my mother and I had, especially those in my twenties and thirties. I suppose by then she considered me to be an adult, and she felt able to move out of the role of being just a mother and reveal herself more fully as a woman. A mother always wants to

protect her children, but if she shares her honest views and experiences at the appropriate time, she can pass on lessons that will enhance her children's lives and possibly improve their chances of building successful relationships. My mother giving her time and sharing her experiences was probably the greatest gift she gave me, and for that I will always be thankful. In this way she lives on in me and alongside me.

My mother and I would sometimes spend a long evening together over a meal, talking about our lives, hopes, dreams and disappointments. I remember one conversation when she talked about how she had married too young, when she was too inexperienced, and how she had felt when suddenly she realised she was a woman of 30 with three young children and unsure whether she had married the 'right man'. Ultimately, she decided to stay within the marriage, to avoid hurting my father, and for the security of her children. My mother had experienced a very painful divorce between her parents as a young girl and didn't wish to inflict that pain upon her own children. So, she and my father continued a 'marriage of convenience'. Whether that was the correct decision, who can tell? But my parents always showed respect towards one another, never fought in front of us children and showed love to each other when it mattered. They allowed each other to get on with their own lives, while keeping the family together.

The fact that my mother was prepared to share all this with me when I was ready meant a great deal to me; firstly, to be acknowledged as an adult and, secondly, for the lessons she passed on to me by simply sharing her authentic life experience. Many parents would keep these aspects of their married life private and secret. While this is to be understood, it can deprive their children of important insights. My mother's wise insights into marriage and relationships, and

how she conducted herself, made a tremendous impression on me and affected how I have conducted my own marriage and parenting. I felt I was privileged to get to know my mother as a woman, and I would like my sons to get to know me as a man. It is an ongoing challenge for me to share my life – and the authentic me – with them, when appropriate, and not always to be restrained by the image and role of being a dad.

My mom's passions

My mother loved nothing better than to spend the whole evening over a tasty meal, accompanied with a bottle of excellent wine. Through this she taught me to eat very slowly (which I hear is also healthy) and enjoy conversing around the dinner table. I married into a family of fast eaters – so my slow pace can be annoying to others – but I tell them my mother lives on inside me.

My mother was passionate about food, cooking and recipes, and was always fascinated by exotic dishes from other cultures. When the first Chinese restaurant opened in Cape Town, she immediately introduced us to this new cuisine, and I remember it as being my first foray into foreign tastes. At the conclusion of a long summer holiday, the day before going back to school, my mom would take my brother, sister and I for a Chinese lunch at this humble and welcome eating house as a special treat, and we loved it. So, as a young boy I learnt to eat with chopsticks – and how exciting that was. When a Japanese café opened in the Cape Town dockyards to cater for Japanese sailors, my mother was one of the first in the queue. And so we were introduced to eating raw fish (sushi and sashimi). My culinary education also extended into Italian, French and Indian cooking. To our friends and guests, our tastes and the food we served often seemed rather strange,



if not shocking. Indeed, when we braaied or baked a fish at home, my brother and I would fight over the fish head – we ate the eyes as a delicacy. In African tradition, we were taught to eat all parts of the fish or animal because nothing should go to waste. That tradition lives on in my own family and my sons are both adventurous eaters and good cooks.

Another passion my late mother shared with me that lives on today, is spending time by the sea. She was a conchologist – a fancy name for a serious shell collector. When I was a young boy, she introduced me to collecting and roaming the beaches and coast. She loved spending hour upon hour roaming up and down a coastline, searching out treasures. And so our house was always full of pieces of coral, shells, driftwood, stones, cleansed bones, and other peculiar objects. This tradition continues: my home is also adorned with found objects. It was a pastime I enjoyed alongside my mother and seeking out special places along the coast with my family remains one of my joys today.



Moyra Fine, theatre producer

During the seventies, my mother and sister both worked at The Space Theatre in Cape Town. This was one of South Africa's first theatre venues to defy the apartheid laws of the day and welcome mixed audiences and casts. That theatre played a vital role in giving actors, directors, and writers a platform they never had in the state-run theatres of the time. It also brought the lives and experiences of black South Africans, which were hidden from most white folk, directly into the foreground. And so my mother introduced me into a world that I, as a young South African, had largely been sheltered from, having attended a whites-only school, and then completing a year of compulsory military service, before going on to university. I saw practically every show staged over a seven-year period, and after completing my studies worked for a year at The People's Space, which continued the work of the old theatre once it closed down. Some of the powerful productions I witnessed there have stayed with me ever since. My apprenticeship provided me with an entry into my first theatre job in London when I left South Africa after refusing to serve in the army and participate in the invasion of Angola.

I once heard a quote by strategist Peter Strople: 'Legacy is not leaving something for people. It's something you leave in people.' My mom certainly left a legacy in me.

Growing up in a rapidly changing landscape

When I look back at the lives of my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents, I am struck by how much their landscapes changed: where and when they were born; how they lived and customs they followed; how the world around them was transformed by migration, war, peace, technology, or politics. For example, just a couple of generations back my great grandparents were brought together through an arranged marriage.

From Russia with love

Arranged marriages still occur today, but for most young people the right to choose your own spouse or future life-partner is paramount. In my family, when growing up, I learnt of my great-grandparents' arranged marriage. My great-grandmother, Becky, was an Irish Jew from Dublin. There was a strict tradition to marry within the Jewish faith and culture, but in Ireland at the time there was a shortage of eligible young Jewish men. In Russia, the Jewish community was under strain, and my great-grandfather Louis's family was looking for an opportunity to arrange for their son to leave Russia and set up a life far away from the dangers and prejudices at home. Somehow the two families connected, and photographs of Becky in Ireland were exchanged with photographs of Louis in Russia. The families arranged for Louis to travel to Dublin to meet his bride. They would marry and travel together to South Africa where they saw opportunities for new immigrants.

While I, personally, subscribe to the notion of choosing one's own partner, I witnessed a warm and loving relationship between my great-grandparents whose marriage – despite being arranged – survived for over 70 years till they passed away in their nineties. I learnt through them that we can develop a loving and close relationship over time, even if we didn't marry for love. They were both such great characters – Becky with her thick Irish accent, and Louis with his pronounced Russian Yiddish accent. Whenever she was irritated by him, Becky would shout out with typical Irish humour, 'Well, as you all know, I never really chose the bastard; he was forced upon me!'

A baker's son

When Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe arrived by ship in Cape Town harbour, many of them quickly took up trades

they had learnt in their countries of origin; Russia, Latvia, Lithuania. And once established and settled in the Cape, many of them sent money to their families to join them in the Cape. And so it was with my paternal grandparents, Gershon and Ella Fine. Gershon, together with another immigrant family, started a baking business, and in time this facilitated the passage over for his parents to join them on the southern tip of Africa.

A baker's day begins with an early start to ensure that fresh bread gets delivered daily, seven days a week. This meant that my father did not get to see much of his father. He never experienced his dad supporting him at a Saturday morning school sports event, or even visiting his school. This was a great loss for my dad and, I imagine, also a great sorrow for his father. Of course, many youngsters experience this, either because their parents are not present in their lives at all, or because their parents have demanding work environments. I only realised later in life that when he became a father himself my dad was determined to reverse this pattern, to be present for his children in a way that his own father could not be. He was often there at the sports field, watching me play. This was a great gift, and one that I have passed on to my own sons by taking an interest in all their performances – on the sports field, in music gigs or on stage. Sometimes all one needs to do is to turn up, to be there, and to witness one's child interacting in the world.

In her book *Becoming*, Michelle Obama writes that the biggest gift her parents gave her was being seen by them, affirmed and valued. She says the future is up to the next generation. Our role as elders is to give them our encouragement and blessing.



Following the same path

In many families, the sons and daughters follow their parents into the same trade or business. My grandfather passed away when his sons were still teenagers and my uncle, the older

brother, took his father's place in the bakery. Eventually, my uncle's eldest son joined the bakery and spent his whole working life in the baking business.

In the south of England, my wife's father also ran a bakery business with several of his brothers. My wife and her siblings all worked there during their school holidays. Eventually the brothers retired, and the bakehouse and several shops were closed. Unfortunately, the opportunities for young people to learn practical skills from their parents and to observe them at work are

diminishing. However, one of the grandchildren has opened a very successful bakery and shop of their own, thus keeping a rich family tradition alive.

Trading runs deep in the veins of my family on my mother's side, also immigrant Jews from Russia and Ireland. Many of them, my great-grandfather for instance, were *smouse*, informal traders in the Great Karoo and Northern Cape. My great-grandfather travelled by horse-drawn wagon to remote farms, trading a wide range of goods that included

ostrich feathers, soaps, and haberdashery with the farmers of the region. His son set up a department store in Cape Town, where trading continued and goods were sold from dresses and trousers to belts, buttons, zips and thread. And his son, my uncle, set up a supermarket chain, extending the business into foods and household supplies. Thus, I have witnessed within my own wider family an orientation to do business that has been passed on from generation to generation.

The times, they are a-changin'

There have been so many dramatic changes both in how we communicate and in how we consume entertainment. I remember my father's description of visits to the cinema on Main Road, Claremont. The audience sat on rows of wooden benches and watched black-and-white movies with no sound. To provide a soundtrack, a pianist, seated at the side of the screen, played throughout the movie, improvising to match the action and mood. My dad described the pianist's great skill in providing music that portrayed suspense, grief, joy or celebration. Soft gentle music would accompany a romantic scene; pounding rhythms a chase or a fight.

I remember the pure excitement and exhilaration I felt as a child when I went to the weekly Saturday morning show at our local cinema, also on Claremont Main Road. The place was packed with children, and the noise level was incredible. Of course, by then, speech and music were recorded on a soundtrack. We saw Walt Disney cartoons in the first half, before intermission. In the break we traded comic books. It was mayhem. In the second half a big favourite was a cowboy series – we watched a new episode each Saturday. I remember the tension amongst us in the audience, our gasps and cries as our heroes triumphed over the evil villains. And when it was all over, all I could think of was what would happen next. I could hardly wait to find out!

Given her experience, in her parenting my mother always allowed and encouraged her three children to follow their passions. This is something I have passed on to my two sons.



When I was a teenager, my parents often took me, my brother, sister and cousins to the one-and-only cinema in the seaside town of Hermanus. In the city, there were several cinemas and, because of apartheid, whites and persons of colour had separate venues. But in the Hermanus cinema, the upstairs seating was reserved for people of colour, and downstairs for whites. I never questioned the whites-only cinemas in Cape Town. As a child it was just how things were. But in Hermanus I witnessed the separation occurring in front of my eyes. I remember vividly the noise and laughter that came from upstairs during the movies, and the irritation of the older white folk downstairs, wishing that 'those upstairs would refrain from being rowdy'. We youngsters were also expected to remain silent during the movie. How I wished to be sitting upstairs, where everyone seemed to be having much more fun than us below.

These memories make me think of how much has changed in just a few generations. The technological changes in our work, entertainment, and communication have been radical. We have transitioned from using old Bakelite dial telephones to pushbutton phones to wireless phones. Changes in cell phone development have also been dramatic: from a 'brick' with a small aerial, to slimline smartphones that can double as a camera. Reel-to-reel movies have been replaced with digital films that we can download from the internet. For our music needs, we have quickly progressed through records and gramophones, cassettes and tape recorders, compact discs, iPods and smartphones. Indeed, in my lifetime, most of my sound equipment and devices have become obsolete at an alarming rate.

I grew up listening to the radio, and first watched television in my late teens. I typed my university assignments on an electric typewriter and used Tipp-Ex to manually

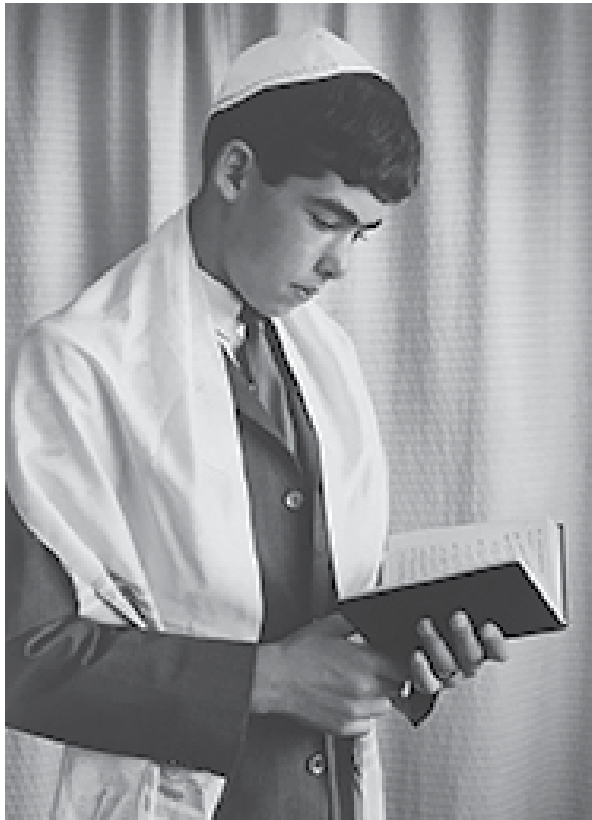
correct all my mistakes. I first worked on a computer in my thirties – a huge, heavy box that took up most of my desk – nothing like the laptops and slim screens now in use. What a different world and childhood my children have experienced when compared to my father's and mine. Instead of watching movies in a packed community cinema, they sit alone or with a couple of friends, huddled around a computer or television screen. WhatsApp, Zoom, Houseparty, Twitter, Instagram, iCloud, Google, Gmail, Dropbox, Facebook, YouTube, UberEats, AirB&B, SnapScan – all these apps form a new language in a new landscape for a new generation.

My father would be lost in today's world. Banking for him was part of a lifelong relationship with his local bank manager whom he would visit weekly for a chat. Daily he would pop into the bank to deposit cheques, with a smile and friendly word for the tellers who knew him by name. Nowadays the call centres, with their bland music and messages while the customer waits in a queue, finally talking to an anonymous staff member, would have left him distraught and bewildered. Of course, doing one's banking online is convenient and quick, but to lose the personal contact and sense of community and belonging that my father enjoyed in these daily interactions is a big price to pay, not only for him but I believe for everyone. I have just

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watched my local branch being downsized and all the staff I have interacted with over many years disappearing behind hidden-away office walls and computers, probably never to be seen by their customers again. Technological advances come at a price. Not so long ago, communication was slow. We wrote letters that were posted, transported, delivered, replied to. Now with email and WhatsApp, we expect an almost instant response. With the improvement in speed of communication, do we feel more connected? Do we feel more listened to?



Nic's bar mitzvah

The gift of a name

Shortly after birth, one of the first gifts we receive is the gift of a name. At the age of 13, as is custom with Jewish boys, I participated in my bar mitzvah, coming-of-age ceremony. In preparation for this rite of passage, I undertook a year of study and individual tuition. But what stands out for me the most from that whole experience is being gifted a special Hebrew name by the rabbi. I had already been named Nicholas at birth by my parents, although I do not know of any significant reasons why they chose it. But the meaning behind my Hebrew name, Naftali, I have kept with me for 55 years.

This is the story the rabbi told me when explaining the name. First, he told me that it means 'conqueror'. That got me very excited as a boy of 12 years old. 'Wow, thanks, Rabbi,' I said, 'that means I will win many great battles and conquer many people!' 'No,' he replied, 'that is not the meaning. The name I am giving you does not signify you should go out to do battle with others. Instead, it implies you will have to do battle with yourself. It refers to you overcoming difficulties and obstacles in your life. It is a name that will hopefully give you strength when faced with challenges, and that will keep you in control of your emotions, focused and disciplined when you need to be.' In a sense this new name symbolised my coming-of-age. Until then, my parents, teachers, and coaches had encouraged me to show discipline and focus. After my bar mitzvah, I was expected to take responsibility for myself as a young man; to exert an internal influence on my thoughts and feelings. I was no longer a 'little boy'.

In our youth work programmes, we have continued this tradition of presenting young men with a special name as they transition from boyhood to young manhood – a name that reflects the unique talents we witness in each of them;

a name that inspires them to grow and stretch, to reach their potential.

When I turned 50, I decided to go on another rite of passage alongside many other adult men who ranged in age from their early twenties to early seventies. Each man was there for his own reason and was transitioning through his specific phase of manhood – entering marriage, the birth of his first child, a change in career, entering retirement. My personal motivation was to explore what it meant for me, at 50, to become an elder within my family and community. We were facilitated through a process in which we chose our own special animal name. I selected ‘lion’ as it signified leadership for me, and there were many positions in my life where I was expected to take a lead. And so I had the name ‘Old Lion’. A facilitator suggested to me to explore the ‘gold within’ as I journeyed towards being an elder. He said, ‘Why don’t you just add the letter “g” to “old” and you will have “gold”’. And so I did and ‘Golden Lion’ was born! When I later discovered that the role of an elder is to support, give service and mentor others, I added ‘earth’ to the name, and it now stands as ‘Golden Earth Lion’.

Just say the word!

I was an early developer, at least physically. I was certainly the hairiest boy in my class. When we were changing and showering after physical training classes or sport, my classmates teased me in the way young boys always do. I can still hear their chant of ‘hairy canary’ as they saw me in the shower. It was all meant in good humour, and thankfully I did not have self-esteem issues at the time.

At around the age of 13, with me well through puberty, I remember one day returning home from synagogue with my father. We were driving alone in his car. He had his

hands on the steering wheel and was staring at the road in front of us. I was in the passenger seat, also staring ahead.

Suddenly, my dad broke the silence and said, ‘My boy, you

know that whenever you have something to ask your father, you must just do so.’ I picked up the tension in my dad; he felt awkward, and I felt awkward. I guessed that he was referring to that taboo subject of sex, but he just could not utter the word. ‘Thanks dad,’ I replied. And that was the end of our sex conversation. I never did ask him any of those questions, and he never broached the subject again. His father had almost definitely not had a conversation about sex with him – and where do dads

learn how to have open, relaxed conversations with their sons if they never experienced this with their parents?

Luckily for me, I had a wise older sister, Andrea. I remember with fondness and appreciation the conversations we had, with me a 15-year-old and she an 18-year-old. We would often sit on our parents’ bed when they were out and have a sex chat. I was concerned about being very inexperienced with girls, especially when many boys at school bragged about their great exploits. During these break-time sessions, I would feel embarrassed and ashamed and have absolutely nothing to say. When I shared this with

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Nic with his sister Andrea

my sister she replied, 'You can bet that 99% of those boys are talking rubbish and have never had those experiences. It's all just stupid boy stuff, them showing off and trying to feel big. Don't let their nonsense worry you. You just take your time, there is absolutely no rush. You have the rest of your life ahead of you.' Her words were so comforting and soothing to my troubled soul. As I grew older, she deepened this conversation by relating some of her personal experiences with men. I remember her telling me that men who waited longer before they had intercourse were often better lovers because they had taken their time when younger to understand women and their bodies much better than the boys who were only interested in penetration. I will always be grateful that I had an older sister to guide and to reassure me

because, when it came to matters of sex, I was genuinely a late developer.

In my work in later life, and after becoming a father myself, I realised that parents often learn on the job. In matters such as talking about sex to our children, most of us never went through a guided process from our elders. How we were educated (or not) around matters of sex is passed on to the next generation. Creating this conversation with our partners and children is often a new and challenging experience. From what I have observed, parents find it easiest to base such a conversation on morality, sometimes from a religious perspective. It seems easier to talk about moral sexual behaviour than the essence of sex itself – relationships, exploration, physical feelings and sensations, emotions, motivation, boundaries. If we can't talk about sex, then of course we also often can't talk about safe sex, which puts our children at possible risk from STDs and HIV.

With some parents and in some cultures, young people are encouraged to report their physical transformation into young adulthood, for example a young girl is encouraged to report her first menstruation to her mother or to some other appropriate adult in her family. Likewise, a young man is encouraged to communicate his first ejaculation to his father or to another male member of his family. In this way, in sharp contrast to the silence, embarrassment and secrecy most parents and children endure, this physical transition can be normalised and celebrated, and important conversations often flow from this practice.

Parents express their feelings

The things that get said to us or that we overhear can affect us deeply and leave an indelible mark. They can lift us up, keep us stuck, or pull us down. The way our parents express

themselves, positively and negatively, can shape the way we communicate. I'll share some examples from my own life.

My mother was in the final phase of her cancer after a year-long struggle. After my father called me to say I should return home from the UK as soon as possible, I managed to get to see her five days before she passed on. I was shocked at how thin and vulnerable she looked. I tried to control my tears and grief but couldn't, and I wrapped my arms gently around her and started weeping. I will never forget the words she whispered softly into my ear. She said, 'If I start crying now, I will never stop.' That statement stopped my tears immediately. I realised that she was trying her best to deal with her own grief in facing the final days of her life, and that I should rather shed my tears away from her and share my grief with other members of the family. I had to stop my flood and engage with where she was at. This was her time, and I needed to respect how she was managing this tough transition from life to death. This was a challenge for me as a young man. I often would not show my grief in front of others, but then, when I was completely overcome, I would cry, wail and sob uncontrollably, which was shocking for those witnessing it. It took me a while to learn that showing my tears in front of others was not a sign of weakness, but of strength. I eventually learnt that having a good cry was liberating, and much better for me than storing it all up inside.

Earlier in the year I had been granted an extended unpaid leave to visit my mother. We spent some wonderful time together. It was my first experience of being with someone close to me who was 'taking their leave' of this world. I was hoping my mom would feel free to discuss her experience of facing death with me, and that we could engage with our grief together. A wise elder I spoke to advised me that I should let her initiate that discussion if she felt the need to. I was told that everyone has their own way of dealing with this phase of life,

and that I shouldn't disturb her process with my needs.

My mom always was very contained, undramatic and restrained. She did not easily express her pain and emotions. She showed her love in her actions, for example, by giving us her time, or preparing a lovely meal. My dad, on the other hand, was very demonstrative. He loved kissing and hugging and would often express himself in a passionate and emotional manner, which was wonderful but also difficult at times.

I will never forget what my father once said to me. As a youngster at school, I was passionate about sport and drama but much less so about what went on in the classroom, and so I started to fall behind in my studies. My father, who felt that he needed to take action, grounded me, stopping all my socialising on weekends. He was also mad about sport – rugby in particular – so he allowed me to continue with that, but he banned me from taking part in the school play.

However, I had other ideas. Being in the school play, especially alongside the girls from our neighbouring girls' school, was a major attraction for me. It was something I had looked forward to for a long time. So, I decided to go underground, and secretly continued to attend rehearsals. One day, my mom asked my dad to pick me up after an extra maths lesson that I was supposed to be attending. I had planned on making my own way home, in my own time. My dad waited a long time for me and eventually drove home. When I finally arrived, he was furious. I had to admit that I had

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been at a rehearsal, and he looked me in the eye and shouted, 'You have stabbed your father in the back!', turned, and walked

I sometimes need to remind myself that my own role as a parent is to witness my children and to give praise and acknowledgement. It is easy to forget this in the ups and downs and frustrations of family life

out. I understood he felt that I had betrayed him and that he was angry and upset with me. But to declare that I had stabbed him in the back was a powerful and emotive thing to say to his son. I knew, too, that he had done a similar thing, disobeying his own father when he was a teenager. He had followed his passion playing sport on Saturday mornings when he was supposed to be representing his father in synagogue. He had just forgotten that. Thankfully, my father and I were able to move on from this incident.

I sometimes need to remind myself that my own role as a parent is to witness

my children and to give praise and acknowledgement. It is easy to forget this in the ups and downs and frustrations of family life. One day my wife and I returned home after a weekend away, surprising our son, who was engrossed on his computer, listening to music. We were upset to see he hadn't cleared up or done other chores as promised, and we immediately expressed our irritation. Slowly his eyes welled up and tears ran down his cheeks. 'What's up?' I asked. 'I don't need you to crap on me,' he replied, 'I feel bad enough anyway. You have no idea

of the hard time I give myself. I don't need you both to do that as well. I have a voice in my head that does that all the time, so when you guys start as well, it gets too much for me.'

That day, by clearly communicating what was going on inside of him – things that were not obvious – my son taught me a valuable lesson. I also re-learned the lesson that we often spend too much time trying to teach, instruct, and discipline our children when, instead, we should praise, encourage, acknowledge, and bless them. I now always do my best when frustrated, to take a deep breath and give myself some space to think first before opening my mouth. I try to remember to ask a question before giving an opinion, to check in before expressing my frustrations.

As a parent, it is important to be able to connect back – to remember what it was like to be a teenager – and to use that knowledge to inform one's response to one's children. Not to compare or to start a lecture with 'In my day...', but rather to respond with compassion, awareness, and understanding from that place of memory and connection to yourself as a youngster instead of reacting as a frustrated and angry parent. I know now, as a parent myself, how tough this can be at times. My father struggled with schoolwork but tried to drive me hard with my studies. When I was determined to take part in the school play, it might have helped if he had remembered his own situation when he was young, when he had followed his passion for sport over religion.

I share these thoughts not out of disrespect or to dishonour my parents. I was privileged to have parents who were there for me and did their best to provide a loving home for all of us. I learnt so much from them, from their strengths – which I have shared – as well as from their weaknesses and blind spots. They were both beautiful and flawed human beings, just as I am. I try to encourage my sons to follow their own passions, make



their own decisions, carve out their own paths in life, even if at times I might be concerned, doubtful or apprehensive. And I am sure that one day my sons will have much to say about my parenting skills, both positive and negative. As apprentice parents, we draw on what we learnt from our parents – the good stuff and the bad.

As the Buddha once said, 'Words have the power both to destroy and to heal. When words are both true and kind, they can change the world.'

Are we ever done with being a parent?

It was my fiftieth birthday celebration. Friends and family were gathered at my house, and it was time for speeches and toasts. My father stepped up to say a few warm words and at one point he referred to me affectionately as his 'little boy'. Afterwards I light-heartedly said, 'Dad, I've just turned 50. Don't you think I'm long past the time of being your little boy?' He looked at me thoughtfully and replied, 'You will always be my little boy, and I will always be your dad.' At the time, I didn't fully understand what he meant. I was a fairly inexperienced father myself, as my first son was born when I was 40 years old, my second son three years later – so my children were still young. But now that I am 68 – with my father long gone, and my sons aged 28 and 25 both having left home – I have deeper insight into what he was saying. You never stop being a parent; your role just changes over time. You always have concerns for your children, whatever life stage they are at. You always think of them, care about their well-being. The age gap between you will always be exactly as it was the day of their birth.

My father acknowledged me as a mature, independent man with a life-partner and two children, but deep inside him I was and would always remain his 'little boy'. Whenever

Whenever he looked at me, he would see both the adult son I had become, and the vulnerable little boy that I had once been. And when I looked at him, I would always see my father, no longer someone I depended on for care, but always my dad.

he looked at me, he would see both the adult son I had become, and the vulnerable little boy that I had once been. And when I looked at him, I would always see my father, no longer someone I depended on for care, but always my dad. As I go through my life, I often imagine what my father was doing at similar moments in his life – when he had his children, when we left home, when he retired. What was he feeling then; what did he experience? These are questions that I didn't ask when he was alive, but that connect me to him now as I, too, go through those significant life phases. We are never done with being a parent. Once parents, we will be parents for all time, and our children will always be our children.



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STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS

The purpose of mentoring, guiding and coaching is ultimately to enable people to experience more joy, become more effective in their lives, build community, and make this world a better and safer place for this generation and the generations that follow. We are facing many immediate and tough challenges – the protection and nurturing of our natural environment, the building of sustainable economies, providing and enhancing access to opportunities within education and employment, to name but a few. To meet the challenges we face, we can all benefit from a strong connection between generations; a positive flow of ideas and meaningful interaction and support between elders, adults, and youngsters within our communities.

There has never been a greater need for clear leadership, sustained mentoring, and insightful guidance. Mentoring comes in many shapes, forms and combinations – informal, formal, long-term, short-term, structured, unstructured, visible, invisible. The stories in this section are examples of different kinds of mentoring processes experienced by a range of individuals. These stories reflect the notion that we are all ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’. We acknowledge those teachers, friends, mentors, and coaches that came before us; all those who have contributed to who we are and what we are doing today. For our success is also their success.





AN INVITATION TO STEP BACK, STEP IN, AND STEP UP

Jo Broadwood

‘But I think the desk should go there!’ said Mikey belligerently. I stared at him in disbelief. Here we were, arguing again – this time over something as trivial as where we were going to put the new desk that had just arrived in our tiny office.

Mikey was 22 years old, a second-year medical student and our newly appointed medical director at the student led charity that I had just joined as the chief executive officer (CEO). He had taken time out of his training to take up the one-year post in order to inspire, engage, and motivate our volunteers across the country to deliver training sessions in basic first aid to young people at risk of violence.

Introducing StreetDoctors

StreetDoctors is at heart a beautifully simple idea – young volunteer medical students teach young people who are at risk of being the victims of violence how to stop bleeding and to do CPR.⁸ It is a peer-to-peer mentoring approach and intervention that is transformational for both groups of young people involved. Young people at risk learn basic life-saving skills and move from being passive bystanders and witnesses to being able to help others. Indeed, we had already heard a number of stories from them about stepping in to save a life. In turn, young medical volunteers gain important teaching and communication skills and, through the process, became better doctors. In my first month at the charity, one

of the experienced volunteers chuckled as she described how volunteers got involved, ‘At first, they join because they think it is going to look good on their achievement record but after six months they have been indoctrinated into the culture of empathy, and then they’re hooked!’

I loved the collaborative leadership model we had at StreetDoctors. Rather than leadership being invested in individuals, it was invested in a role. Each team was structured around several key leadership roles that were essential to keep the team functioning and happy (a very important role was that of social secretary!). Clearly defined roles, a mentoring and buddying programme (more experienced volunteers would buddy new volunteers stepping into a role for the first time), and leadership roles at local and national levels, including that of medical director meant that leadership was shared across the organisation. When I tried to explain the StreetDoctors model to others, I would describe it as being like a swarm of bees, a shoal of fish, or a murmuration of starlings. Each individual could make a difference acting alone, but acting collaboratively and together, StreetDoctors was a force to be reckoned with – a UK-wide social movement of young medics addressing violence. It relied absolutely on everyone playing their part, giving and keeping their word on whatever they pledged to do for their team and, more importantly, for the young people impacted by violence.

Stepping back

Like most of our volunteers, Mikey was super smart, capable and confident, with a real determination to make a difference. He was also the product of a highly competitive education system that valued individual effort over collaboration with others. Our first two months of working together had been characterised by him challenging me on nearly every decision

8 Cardiopulmonary resuscitation



I made, no matter how big or small. I had been appointed to grow and scale-up the organisation from a student-based volunteering network to a UK wide charity with a StreetDoctors teams in all the major cities where violence affected young people. I normally view challenge from colleagues as an opportunity to build shared ground and vision, but Mikey's continual arguing was slowing me down and I was at a bit of a loss. At the same time, I knew it was essential to keep him on board. I was new to the organisation and a non-medic. If I lost Mikey, I would lose the volunteers. His role was critical in keeping all our volunteers delivering sessions across the country, and the funding we had just been granted was conditional on achieving some ambitious targets.

I also liked him enormously. Our initial chats had revealed we had things in common. Mikey's middle-class accent belied his working-class upbringing; just like me 30 years before, he had poshed up to fit in at university. And, like me, he had had a difficult adolescence. In one of our conversations, he shared that he could easily have ended up in the same place as some of the young men who attended our sessions in youth offending centres. We both had made deliberate choices at quite young ages to get off the trajectory our backgrounds had destined for us and to choose another path.

The week before, I had seen Nic Fine, a dear friend and past mentor, and he had laughingly reminded me of how fierce and argumentative I had been when I had first met him at the beginning of my thirties. Nic had recruited me to work with him as a trainer and facilitator with Leap Confronting Conflict, designing and delivering a leadership programme for young men at a young offenders' institution. Six weeks into our working relationship, we had popped out to a local

café for lunch, and yet again I was disagreeing with him about something. Instead of getting into an argument, Nic drained his cup and said thoughtfully, 'I notice that we are often in disagreement.' I was momentarily stopped in my tracks. As I drew breath to reply, he smiled and stood up to make his way to the counter to pay. I followed him out the café shaking my head and no doubt trying to work out whether I agreed!

In the days and weeks that followed, that small exchange had a profound impact on me. I found myself stepping back, not just in my conversations with Nic, but also with others, to see if my interactions followed a predictable pattern. And I started to listen to myself and to others, to find points of agreement that could be foundation stones for moving forward together.

Sometimes I did just want to shake Mikey, but I also knew that he really wanted to do well. So, rather than engaging in another argument, this time about the desk, I just looked at him and said, 'I notice that we are often in disagreement, Mikey.' He looked at me suspiciously, and then, just as Nic had done 30 years previously, I smiled at him in a friendly non-confrontational way and turned and walked out of the room. When I returned half an hour later, Mikey was busily tapping away at his laptop. I returned to my desk and resumed my own work. 'So, are you going to tell me what you mean?' I smiled and replied, 'Yes, sure, but let's discuss it in our next supervision session.'

We both had made deliberate choices at quite young ages to get off the trajectory our backgrounds had destined for us and to choose another path.



Stepping in

I planned the next supervision session carefully. I knew I needed to engage Mikey in reflecting on his habitual ways of thinking and doing, but in a way that made him feel that there was something in it for him. To be successful, I would need the coaching and facilitation skills I had developed over many years working with young people in prison and community settings and, later, training and mentoring the community of facilitators and trainers at Leap Confronting Conflict. These were skills I had learnt from people like Nic, who had been patient and thoughtful, coaching and facilitating me in my own development.

In the supervision session, Mikey and I discussed the goals he wanted to set for himself that year. We boiled these down to his wanting to be the best medical director he could be. I asked him what he needed from me to help him do that. He said he needed my support and we discussed support and what it might look

and feel like. As our conversation developed, I introduced the coaching analogy that was a core part of the Leap approach and that Nic had introduced me to all those years ago. The job of a coach is to say what they see and hear, to be 100% committed to improving the player's performance.

'So, what do you think I was doing when I said I notice that we are often in disagreement, Mikey?' I asked.

He paused for a minute. 'Being my coach?'

Quietly I breathed a sigh of relief. 'Yep, exactly that, but at that point I was being your coach without your permission.'

He looked puzzled again.

'I can't be your coach without your permission, Mikey. But if you give me your permission to coach you, then I promise you I will give 100% commitment to you being the best medical director you can possibly be.'

He grinned. 'Does that mean you get to tell me what to do?'

I laughed, 'Sometimes. As your coach, there will be times I can see things you aren't so aware of – skills or capabilities you need to develop. But I will always act out of my commitment to you being your absolute best – I want you to have a brilliant year and achieve the remarkable things I think you are capable of.' I paused. 'So, do I have your permission to be your coach?'

Stepping up

From that day on, Mikey's and my relationship transformed. That first year was a tough year, full of change for the organisation. We brought in a new way of evaluating our impact across all the teams and commissioned and implemented an online system for helping volunteers to organise their local teams and log evaluation data. It was a big cultural shift and there were many challenges. It was also the first time I had ever held the role of CEO, so I was learning a huge amount, too, and was often filled with terrible doubt about my own capabilities and skills in the job. The work was hard, and I was doing long hours in a tiny office on the top floor of an old Victorian building that was too cold in winter and too hot in summer. But Mikey was a great companion, often staying late with me, both of us working away on our laptops, occasionally looking up to watch the sun set over the rooftops of east London.

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The relationship Mikey and I built together was a huge source of strength and support to me and a foundation for every goal we set our sights on that year. I knew that with Mikey on my side we had a chance of achieving those ridiculously ambitious targets. And we completely smashed them. For the first time we were collecting consistent and credible evidence of our impact, building a reputation for the work. By the end of Mikey's year as medical director, the volunteers had delivered nearly twice as many sessions as in previous years, which meant that many more young people received life-saving training.

Core components of a mentoring relationship

The core components of the mentoring or coaching relationship I developed with Mikey are present in every mentoring or coaching relationship I have had as a mentor and as a mentee. In any conversation as a mentor or a coach, either formal or informal, you are inviting someone to:

- *Step back* (from the present situation, from strong feelings, from the problem) – to support curiosity and reflection, and allow for wondering and wandering;
- *Step in* (to intervene in a habitual thought pattern, a fixed position or way of seeing) – to reframe, help to see the situation through fresh eyes; and
- *Step up* (commit to trying something different, acting differently, committing to a goal and/or course of behaviour) – to practise and embed the difference.

In all of this I fully appreciate I am standing on the shoulders of giants. I learnt about stepping back, stepping in, and stepping up, by watching and learning from amazing mentors working with young people who had experienced such hardship that they were in despair and unwilling to

let others in to support them. With support and coaching, these young people were enabled to make changes in their lives. It is not necessary to have experienced hardship for the impact of this approach to be profound. Each person brings themselves and their own life to the model. The tools provide frameworks for intervention in our own habitual ways of thinking and feeling and are applicable to everyone, whatever their circumstances. The approach is valuable for us all and has certainly supported my own professional and personal development.

I use the skills that I learnt at Leap from Nic, and others, all the time. Over years they have become embedded and unconscious. I use them in my current role, in my volunteering work, and with the young people in my life. I particularly value working with young leaders and young people. I love their energy and perspective and I learn far more from them than they do from me.

Currently I am mentoring a young black female CEO of a youth organisation. She is the most phenomenally talented and passionate young woman, and I am so grateful she chose me as her mentor. The first task, whenever we meet, is to help her step back from the huge responsibilities of running a frontline youth organisation and create some space to reflect. Throughout the challenges of the last year – the COVID pandemic and then the anger and grief sparked by the murder of George Floyd in the United States – we have met regularly online. There is so much I am learning from her. I don't always agree with her analysis or her strategy, but I am

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experienced enough to know that younger people see things we older people don't always see. Sometimes our job is to support them and get out of the way.

The other young person I am mentoring is my beloved 'guide son', (his parents are not religious but wanted other adults in his life to support and guide him). He is 15 years old and wants to be an actor. But of course, the plays and performances he had planned for the year have all been cancelled because of COVID. I have assembled a little group

of people connected with the theatre – writers, performers, artists. Every month or so, we choose a monologue for him to learn and we meet online and he performs the piece for us and gets feedback. His mum told me recently that in his research for the famous soliloquy from *Hamlet* he watched nearly 30 versions of the play. The latest piece is from Roy William's play *Sucker Punch*, which is about a young black boxer in Britain in the eighties. And now (much to his parents' consternation) he

is investigating boxing and is doing some boxing lessons in preparation. I love the seriousness of his approach – he is 100% committed to being an actor and he knows that I am 100% committed to his commitment.

One of my mentors died two years ago. She was a friend I had known for 30 years, whom I met first at Leap Confronting Conflict. There are a group of us who all met there at about

the same time, a community of people flung far and wide now, but we all share that same training and approach. Ros was the kind of friend you turn to first when facing a difficult dilemma because she told you the truth even if it was uncomfortable to hear. She was fierce and funny and uncompromising. I still hear her voice in my head. Since her death from cancer, I have endeavoured to be more like her, from trying to keep my wardrobe tidier, to trying to care less what others think, to being more decisive. There was a small group of her friends who were very present during her last months. We were there as she got progressively weaker and frailer. We supported her to stay at home for as long as possible and then got her into a hospice when she decided that was where she would rather die.

Stewarding someone in their dying is an intense and painful process. There is, however, learning in it – it teaches you the true nature of love. And it means you think about your own dying and the choices you would make in similar circumstances. It brings you to reflect on your own mortality and how you want to spend your remaining time. The last time I saw Ros, I painted her nails for her. She was in a lot of discomfort by then and very weak but she really wanted her nails done. She chose the brightest red. She died two days later. Another friend was with her just before she slipped into unconsciousness. She remarked on Ros's nails. Weak as she was, Ros gave a grin and raised her hand to show them off.

We all need others who are just up ahead of us on the path we are on, maybe just around the corner and a bit out of sight, but they are treading the grass down for us, removing the tree roots from the track, helping us navigate unfamiliar terrain, showing us the way. I am so grateful for all the people who have told me stories about their own choices in life, supported me to make difficult decisions, and shown me

I am experienced enough to know that younger people see things we older people don't always see. Sometimes our job is to support them and get out of the way.



the way; for those who have coached and mentored me; for those who have given me permission to mentor them. Some I have lost touch with, some have died, and some are my dear friends. We are all connected by the times we have shared, the stories we have told, the things we have taught each other – how to live, and now, increasingly, how to live and love well as an older person, how to manage frailty, and eventually how to die. We live on inside one another. We pass the stories and knowledge down; we are all connected.

Postscript: In writing this piece I reconnected with Mikey. He has become a wonderful doctor and has just become a father for the first time.

And so, the story continues...



Jo Broadwood's former colleague, Mikey





MENTORS CHANGING MY LIFE

Steve McCreadie

I present four stories to show the life-changing importance of mentors, rooted in my own experience as a student in my twenties, an emerging leader, and a senior leader responsible for others.

September 1985

It had to be today. I climbed the stairs with heavy legs. I was on my way to meet my tutor, Iain.

I was a second-year student, studying community work in Edinburgh. I knew I was good, but I certainly wasn't as good as I had thought I was. I'd cruised my way through first year but, with years of experience behind him, Iain quickly got the measure of me. He had given me tough but perfectly valid feedback. And I was reeling from that feedback. I had become complacent in my first year, assuming I had little more to do to be successful. Iain helped correct that assumption. Even now, over 30 years later, I can remember some of his words. 'You think people listen to you...but they don't. You are like the wallpaper in a room, becoming invisible quickly, a bland background...a hayseed, blown around with little substance.'

As I struggled with his message to me, I avoided him for weeks. I used different stairs to access the building. I avoided him in the canteen, arriving and leaving at different times; anything to make sure I didn't have to face him or, more importantly, what he had told me about myself. But I couldn't avoid another tutorial for very much longer. Eventually, I

worked out a strategy. And my strategy was well thought through. Nervously, I knocked on the door.

'Come in,' he said.

'I want to start by saying thank you,' I said with all the conviction I could muster. Quizzically, he looked at me. I pressed on, becoming rather more nervous. This wasn't exactly the response I was expecting. 'Thank you,' I said. 'I know it must have been difficult to have given me that feedback when we last met.'

There was a long, uncomfortable silence.

At last he said, giving me a strange look, 'You still don't get it, do you? I didn't give you that feedback for your benefit.' He went on, 'Assuming that you qualify and leave here to work, there are hundreds, maybe thousands of people, you may impact on. They deserve better than who you are today. And I know you can be better. My feedback isn't for your benefit; it's for the people not in this room today.'

And in that moment, I got it – not in theory, but in my gut; a powerful message that I needed to do more with the resources I had. I needed to dig deeply into who I was, what I brought, how I could use my skills and, crucially, what I needed to change about myself. Of course that earlier version of me would have told you with great passion that I was studying community work to improve people's lives. But Iain helped me understand in a very direct, powerful way what I really needed to learn and do.

That lesson still resonates with me, more than 30 years later. It brought to the very front of my mind that it's easy to pay lip-service to our beliefs; that how we put our values into practice matters as much, if not more, than what we say. I often remember Iain and what he taught me. This anchors my thoughts and helps bring clarity when faced with complex and competing issues. There have been many



times I have had to think carefully about giving feedback and listening to it while leading teams, coaching people, and reflecting on my own behaviour. I've always strived to make sure the people who can't be in the room, but whose lives may be impacted by the decisions made in the room, are at the centre of my mind. That has enabled me to make some difficult decisions with courage, boldness and great sensitivity.

The key message I learnt from Iain has travelled with me, guiding and keeping me on track as I worked my way through my studies, emerging as a newly-qualified community development worker in 1987. I began my working life, gradually building my experience, and became a manager, responsible for more decisions, selection, performance management, supervision and service design.

Ten years later I moved with my family to take on a new, exciting and highly pressured role. I was responsible for leading and designing a totally new innovative service, with a multidisciplinary team of 20 people. The service had a high profile, and there were great expectations of succeeding. Of course I was ambitious to make an impact, for the people we worked for, firstly, but also to increase my skills and develop my career.

October 1998

The lesson I learnt from Iain was crucial in helping me keep my bearings when, in only the second year of leading this new service, I became almost lost in a fog of differing interpretations, views and emotions. The room was full of people I'd worked closely with for many months, at pace and under pressure, over a large part of Scotland. This was no ordinary meeting – it was being held because people had concerns about my leadership. Had I been impatient in

setting things up, or had I listened properly to people's views and comments? Had I balanced the need to deliver at speed with the need to take people along with me? Many of those in the room clearly thought not.

They were accompanied by their representatives and my manager, a diminutive but powerful woman called Melody, who was chairing the meeting. She knew the meeting and follow-up processes required a serious and formal approach, and she was committed to listening to and considering people's concerns. One by one, people said what they were unhappy about. Much of it was difficult for me to hear, and I was not able to reply in this meeting. My job was simply to listen.

I had worked exceptionally hard. I felt that I had done my best and that together we had achieved a lot. Yet, here were all these people saying they were very unhappy about the way in which I had led them during the last several months. I was at a key point in my career, with a young family to support. I was worried; my fears about what might happen running away with me.

At the end of this difficult, complex and challenging meeting, I left the room with Melody. I was reeling and felt that I was on the ropes. Melody looked at me and said, 'Wow. What an amazing opportunity you have.' I was stunned.

Had I been impatient in setting things up, or had I listened properly to people's views and comments? Had I balanced the need to deliver at speed with the need to take people along with me?



What on earth did she mean? 'This is exactly the kind of situation expensive consultants simulate to provide learning,' she continued. 'People would pay a lot of money to be in your shoes right now.' With her words, Melody reframed the situation, challenging me to see it as a gift, an opportunity to learn leadership in a very direct, powerful way if I remained open to listening, learning, adapting and improving. Irrespective of the outcome, I could focus on being defensive, closed and critical of people's comments, or I could be open, trusting and forward looking.

Reframing the experience as a positive opportunity meant that I was able to learn hugely valuable lessons, which I have carried with me to this day.

August 2014

Now guided by two crucial messages and lessons, over the

next 17 years I continued to develop as a leader and manager. I took responsibility for many differing senior leadership roles, including becoming Executive Director in Children and Family Services. And in that role, in 2014, I faced another key decision.

Karen and I met for coffee and to discuss my way forward. I had arrived early, but Karen had already found a quiet corner and ordered coffee and cake. I settled in my seat and began to talk excitedly about the letter I had received from the Deputy First Minister of Scotland. Earlier that year I had developed

a new initiative to encourage innovation, developing people and skills. I had written to the Scottish Government to highlight this work, and to be honest, expected to hear nothing back. To my delight, the Deputy First Minister had invited me to meet him and talk about how my plans could be developed.

Karen, the director of marketing and fundraising in the charity I worked in, was the most encouraging and insightful leader I had met for years. Enormously respected, super smart, warm and fizzing with energy, she always had plans. The running joke was that you didn't have to have a plan for your career if you went to see Karen because she would quickly create one for you. As I described what I thought was possible, Karen could see what I couldn't yet – my vision for what was possible was constrained, limited by my fear. She challenged me to be bold, adventurous, and much more ambitious.

Karen knew I was facing some tough choices. I held an important position in a large charity, arguably the kind of job many would give their eye teeth for. I had to decide whether I wanted to secure this role, leading around 500 staff, or whether I wanted to take the leap to set up a totally new venture that I would design, bringing together everything I had learnt over 30 years – a scary but exciting risk.

Prompted by Karen's passion for the future, her unwavering belief in me and in what could be achieved, I asked some deep questions about my motivation. As I reflected on what Iain, Grace and Karen had taught me through mentoring, I knew I had reached a point where my responsibility was to create similar opportunities for others. A few months later, in April 2015, I began a start-up organisation that consisted of only me and my laptop. There was no team and no office, but there was a clear-headed sense of vision, purpose and drive. I was about to begin one of the most fulfilling episodes in my

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professional career. I created and developed The Lens, a totally new way of listening to ideas from people in organisations, especially those closest to people in communities. The Lens is designed to help people see and think differently. Over the next three years I grew The Lens into a team of ten trusted mentors and coaches, working with more than 25 charities and public sector organisations, harnessing creativity for front-line staff, supporting hundreds of people, and finding and developing life-changing ideas.

March 2018

As the applause died down, Tom stood on stage, grappling with the reality of what had just happened. He couldn't believe he had pitched to an audience of over 200, including his peers and senior leaders, and secured over £10 000 to develop an idea he had created. As he walked off the stage, applause still ringing in his ears, he shook my hand and said, 'You took me from nothing, and made me into something.' I strongly disagreed with his assertion that he was nothing, but his perspective showed just how much mentoring and coaching had helped him grow, develop, and take direct action to improve people's lives.

Tom was a cemeteries supervisor and saw first-hand the impact of funeral poverty. He wanted to do something about it but didn't have the confidence in himself, his idea or his organisation's willingness to take him seriously. When his organisation chose to work with The Lens, he saw an opportunity to do something about it.

Reframing a situation is often uncomfortable. It is more likely to happen when a trusted mentor challenges and encourages us to take a very different perspective. Working closely with his coach and mentor, Tom began to work up his idea into a solid venture that could secure investment. He grew

in belief and confidence, making changes and designing new partnerships way beyond people's expectations. Our strap line in The Lens is that we help people to see and think differently. Mentoring brings that to life.

Tom created a new service within the public sector, slashing the cost of an average funeral by £2000 and providing a dignified, affordable funeral service. By putting his idea into practice and seeing the benefits for others, he was able to think of himself in a very different way.

As a paediatric palliative care pharmacist, Kate was trusted to guide and care for the most vulnerable children. Yet there



Kate, a participant in a The Lens programme



were many more children across Scotland she wanted to reach. Kate was an expert in her field, but was unsure about how her idea to create a community network of paediatric palliative care pharmacists could be realised. Within The Lens, Kate was able to develop her idea. At each session,

she hesitantly described what might be possible, and others shared and understood her vision, felt her passion and were visibly moved by what she wanted to achieve. She allowed them to challenge and shape her thinking, build on her considerable expertise, and help her deliver a knock-out pitch to win investment. Kate secured the support of the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer of Scotland and went on to deliver a pilot project that she plans to extend across the whole of

Scotland, reaching more children and families.

Without mentoring, Tom and Kate's ideas would have remained just that, ideas. A mentor can change how we think and act and how we can improve people's lives. I have had

the rich experience of three hugely influential people altering the course of my life and am now privileged to be creating similar opportunities for others.

Since The Lens was created in 2015, we have supported 21 different organisations with 208 ideas, securing initial investment of £646 000 and leading to further investment of £627 000. Mentoring has been pivotal to that process. It is what has led those with ideas to decide to take risks, learn new skills, and develop themselves and their life-changing ideas.

When I built mentoring into the fabric of what we do at The Lens, there were four key principles that stood out: purpose, permission, possibility and production. For example, Tom and Kate were passionate about their *purpose* and what they wanted to achieve. That commitment meant they allowed people *permission* to challenge and push them because they knew people were aligned with their purpose. With that in place, they were willing to see *possibility*, creating new, innovative ways to improve lives. Perhaps most importantly, both were willing to act (*produce*), by being bold and committed to making a difference.

As I reflect on my conversation over 30 years ago with Iain, it's these four key principles I can see. I hope and believe he would be proud of what I chose to do with the mentoring, feedback, and challenge he gave me on behalf of the people who really matter.

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MY UNCLE BOETIE: A TRUE LEADER

Fairiza Brey

My Uncle Boetie (Nazier Harnaker), my mother's brother, was the last born of eight children. Interestingly, during his life he cared for his seven siblings, all older than him. At the age of 65 years, he tragically succumbed to COVID-19 on 19 December 2020. A legend to many, he was a man of many talents and multiple roles: husband and father, successful businessman, community worker, lay counsellor, youth mentor, networker, collaborator, lay advocate, spokesperson for the underprivileged, natural comedian, and friend to all who crossed his path; a true pragmatist. Most of all, he was a deeply spiritual man who endured many years of hardship and emotional turmoil but rose above his circumstances. His personal transformation also benefitted thousands; he was there in an instant for anyone in need. He was a local superhero who 'walked the talk', as the saying goes. His deep sense of compassion, generosity, empathy, wisdom, sharp wit, social justice, intuition and honesty meant that family, friends and acquaintances gravitated towards him. Uncle Boetie's name became synonymous with humour, come rain or shine. He was able to uplift anyone's spirit with his permanent smile and infectious laugh. He made every individual in his presence feel special and loved.

A month before he passed on, Uncle Boetie called a prayer meeting for his friends and family, where he reminded us to be grateful to God as He does so much for us, and to ask ourselves what we do for Him. Before being diagnosed with COVID-19, Uncle Boetie prepared his family and close friends



Nazier Harnaker and his grandson Abdul Kader Harnaker

for his death, saying, 'I have a feeling that I will not be alive for long.' He wrote a note to his immediate family, wherein he asked for forgiveness from everyone in the event that he had hurt them in any way – a trait of a humble person. He asked me in a face-to-face meeting if God would be pleased with him and I said, 'God is very merciful.' I'm certain that the Lord is very pleased with him as he has been a true servant,



serving His creation tirelessly through feeding schemes and healing young people who had lost their way, as well as through other community projects. I speak for all his family when I say Uncle Boetie was not only an uncle, brother or cousin, but also a dear friend, mentor, and true leader – a visionary. May his dear soul rest in peace and may we strive to emulate his teachings and beliefs; in so doing his memory will live with us forever. We all miss him dearly.

It is with love that I present the interview below – Uncle Boetie in his own words.

Interview with Nazier Achmat Harnaker

Salaams (peace). My name is Nazier Achmat Harnaker, better known as Boetie Harnaker, or 'little B' in some circles. I'm 65

years old. I have a big family: I am the youngest of eight children – I have five sisters and two brothers. I had a sound upbringing with strong family and moral support. I went to a prominent pre-school and primary school, where I was taught the

Islamic values that have carried me through my life.

I found school to be very boring. One day, the principal said to me, 'Mr Harnaker, we can't have two principals in the same school, so it's better that you leave.' So, I left school in Standard 8. After that, through my father's support and my interest in business, I learnt many skills. My father was an inspiration and a motivator in terms of business.

I got married at the age of around 24. I have a good wife

and we have had three sons, but one passed on at the young age of 21.

When my first business succeeded, I ventured into other businesses. I think it will take me two long weekends to tell you how many businesses I was involved in! Just to mention a few: from general dealer, I expanded to selling fresh fruit and veg. I had a bakkie selling fish on the road. Then I started a taxi service. I also got involved in an engineering company. I opened three second-hand/pawn shops and started selling jewellery. Then, when my uncle passed on, I managed his hardware business. Following that, I went into the building trade and opened a plumbing company and then, later, started an electrical company and became a supplier to a builders' bargain centre.

I think that was when I moved off track; I was too focused on business and I lost sight of my Creator and my religion. It became all about the money. I didn't care where the money came from, as long as I gained at the end of the day. I had moved into the fast lane, with fast cars and fast guns. Then, something happened to change me.

I was about 38 years old when I visited a good friend of mine who was involved in a court case. I could see that he was not himself; he was moving in and out of the room. Eventually, he came out with a mirror in his hand with three lines of white powder, which I thought was baby powder. He asked me, 'Do you know what this is?' I said, 'No, not really.' He said, 'It's cocaine. It's a very good natural booster, it boosts all your senses. Once you have some you can do everything better, you are wide awake, everything will feel better.' So, me with a very inquisitive mind, I wanted to experiment with this thing.

To cut a long story short, from experimenting I ended up blowing over five million rand on drugs. Through my drug

I had moved into the fast lane, with fast cars and fast guns. Then, something happened to change me.



addiction, I lost my wife and my children, and ended up like a *bergie* (mountain dweller) on the street. Sometimes I would sleep on a bare cement floor with a piece of cardboard under me, and another piece of cardboard on top of me, totally penniless. I think this all came to a head in around 2002. As they say in Afrikaans, *as jy met semels meng, dan gaan die varke jou opvreet* (if you are mixed up with the bran, then the pigs will eat you up). That's what happened to me – I was in the wrong place, at the wrong time, with the wrong people. I had major court cases involving major crimes. I had been set up and was wanted by cops, gangsters and vigilante groups. But by the grace of the Almighty I was acquitted on all my charges.

So, since 2002, I have been totally clean. I told myself back then, it is now or never. Either I will be imprisoned, or I will be killed. It was on a Thursday night that I decided that I would go to mosque the next day to give myself over to the Almighty. I walked to the mosque in central town that Friday, our holy day. I cried and I begged the Almighty for forgiveness and asked Him to help me.

A year later I got back with my wife. I thought everything would be fine, but my wife informed me that we were sitting with some major problems: all three of our sons were addicted to cocaine. They were so bad, that they were spiking the drug into their bloodstream. Then my battle started, trying to help my children. I did not leave a stone unturned. Unfortunately, there was not one organisation that was prepared to help me without money. It was always about the money, this fee and that fee, which I couldn't afford. Then, through the support of my family, I managed to find help from a spiritual healer who said he could help my youngest son through hypnotherapy. He did the therapy on the Monday – it cost me R2000 – and then on the Tuesday my

son started smoking again.

I then got some more money together and I sent my eldest son to a rehab (I don't want to mention names). They charged me R10 000 to detox, and then there was a monthly fee. Two months after he was discharged from the rehab he relapsed, and that has been the pattern for quite a few years. I think my eldest son has been to every second rehab centre in Cape Town. Then I heard about two gentlemen from Pretoria who offered to help. I had them over to my house to help both my sons. It cost me R28 000 for the weekend, but by the Tuesday the two of them were back on drugs. What drove me to do everything possible to help my two sons is that a year prior to this I had lost my youngest son to the scourge of drugs. And that was when I promised that I would fight drugs to the bitter end. Unfortunately, it is a long and difficult road because when you fight drugs and crime, you are also fighting SAPS (South African Police Service) and the justice system. Just a few days ago a cop was boasting to me that he caught ten of our 'recoveries' with drugs. I asked him, 'And how many merchants did you get?' and he couldn't reply.

The other day I went to Athlone Court and there were 40 drug-related cases on the court roll on that day; 38 of them were for possession of drugs. Three merchants control an entire area. It is a joke that 2000 people can't fight three merchants! If you do anything to these merchants, you get locked up and arrested. There are more merchants mushrooming because it is a very lucrative

Then my battle started, trying to help my children. I did not leave a stone unturned.





Nazier Harnaker (Uncle Boetie)

business; they make more money than any professor or doctor, so I don't think dealing in drugs will ever stop. And SAPS can't seem to touch them!

Anyway, I started a support group at my house. We took children off the street and put them through counselling sessions. Unfortunately, we had no rehab centre. One evening, a few years later, when I went for prayers at mosque, I met with a group of gentlemen from Durban. They had heard about our plight and struggle and offered to help and support. It was about 12 years ago that I hosted them at my house, and ever since I have been involved with R.A.U.F (Re-focus and Upliftment Foundation), which is based in Durban. We have support groups in Cape Town at the York Street Mosque and in Mitchells Plain. Every year R.A.U.F. takes some of our young men, most of the time without any payment. I can honestly say that no amount of money can repay these people. For 11 years now, they have helped our patients,

giving them residential stay in Durban, completely free. We have a 70 to 75% recovery rate. They are definitely doing something right, and it costs us nothing!

According to the law, you can't force someone into rehab, they must want to go, because how can you force someone when his mind is 'somewhere between June and July', all over the place? Recovery takes over your entire life. You must go through a detox. But some boys get addicted to the legal drug used to detox, and that can be a waste of time and money. The key players are the parents. Parents are the master enablers, sorry to say, but many of the children are spoilt and kept in a comfort zone, and the other siblings don't get the parents' attention; only the child in trouble does.

The parents of one boy brought him to us about 12 years ago. They complained that their son stole everything from them. 'We have come to empower ourselves,' they said. The son was evicted from their home, and they laid charges. The boy spent some time in jail and then he lived on the streets. He came to the support group looking like a *bergie*. He was sent to R.A.U.F. and eight months later they told me he was discharged, but that he didn't want to go back home. Now he has been clean for 11 years, is married and has a child. He qualified as an electrician. He has been with R.A.U.F support group for the past 12 years, is a mentor for boys in schools, is a motivational speaker, does radio programmes, and is also a lay counsellor. He is one of our success stories, 'a sparkling floodlight'. Yes, there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel!

I suppose you can say there has been a 360-degree turnaround in my life. One of my main inspirations was my late mom. She lived her life for other people; she was a people's person. I figured out from her that the more you give, the more you get. Since I have been clean, I've been

on pilgrimage four times. I believe what you pray for will be answered. I get a lot of joy from feeding people. There is a difference between giving money to a poor person and feeding a poor person. I once had an experience where I wanted to give a three-year-old child some soup, but she said, 'We have nothing at home to put the soup in.' The child went looking for a bowl from door to door. Eventually she arrived with one and I could give her some food – the expression on her face was priceless.

We have feeding schemes five days a week, employing four people to feed the people. Within two hours, ten pots of food are empty! We do Delft, Hanover Park, Piketberg,

Porterville and other squatter camps. It is sad to see how people are struggling to feed themselves and their families. It can happen to any of us. We must be grateful to the Almighty daily for granting us food on the table. No one is too bad to become good and vice versa. The choices we make have consequences.

I've learnt the hard way, there are no shortcuts in life and succumbing to peer pressure only leads to your own destruction. No one can use and abuse you if you don't allow it. It's never too late, anyone can change for the better, I am living proof thereof. Thanks to the Almighty who has given me a second chance in life.

NAZIER ACHMAT HARNAKER'S FAVOURITE SAYINGS:

'Put God first in whatever you do in life; you will attain peace and success.'

'Don't chase after this material world; you came into this world with nothing, and you will leave with nothing.'

'Everyone wants to go to heaven, but nobody wants to die – self-introspect constantly.'

'Respect your parents and others, even yourself.'

'People can only do to you what you allow – so be fair to others and yourself.'

'You will not become poor by giving; charity begins at home.'

'Know the difference between needs and wants; often we want more than we need.'

'Don't judge others, that is God's job.'

'Be grateful to God in every situation, good or bad, because God knows best.'

'Live simply, love all and laugh often, even at yourself. You only have one life, so make the most of it.'

'Nothing is a problem if you don't make it a problem – focus on the solution.'



ARTHUR BENJAMIN: A MENSCH IN THE TRUEST SENSE

Nic Fine

Introducing Arthur

I had the privilege of knowing 'Arturo' for around 40 years. In the late seventies, I worked alongside him at the legendary Space Theatre in Long Street, Cape Town. Our paths crossed again early in the eighties when I was working in the UK, and he was doing post-graduate studies at Cardiff University in Wales. When Hearts of Men (HOM) was established in 2001 after my return to SA, Arthur joined the management board and was a valued and insightful mentor to the organisation for well over a decade. Arthur passed on several years ago. In this chapter, I share stories describing his career and the influence he had on me and so many others. Arthur was a mensch, in the truest sense of the word!

Arthur was born on the island of St Helena and came to Cape Town in 1949 as a four-year-old (just after the Nationalist Party came to power) with his mother Mary (a Gambian descendent of American slaves), his father Billy (of Anglo/Irish descent) and his younger sister, Margaret. In his writings Arthur remembers the story of their arrival in Table Bay.



Arthur Benjamin

Arthur in his own words

'We evoked quite some confusion when we docked in Cape Town. There we were, a white father of 30, a black mother of 28, my very brown self, and my just as brown little sister. A relative of my father's had come down from Port Elizabeth to welcome us. He gave us one look and suggested that my father go to work with him in a car assembly plant in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) and leave us behind in Cape Town with some of our maternal family. My father told him to get lost in no uncertain terms!

'For the following 12 years we were to live in about 12 different locations. We stayed in rooms, a garage, servants' quarters, a shed, together with friends and family. We were

like migrants constantly moving all over the peninsula, from Green Point to Claremont to Constantia, back to Claremont, to Lansdowne (twice), to Newlands, to Athlone (twice) to Surrey Estate, to Belgravia, and then finally to Bridgetown!

‘We experienced so much compassion from so many different people. And now in my life I find it very easy to be of service to others. This was instilled in us by our parents who shared whatever they had with others, and likewise others shared with us.’⁹

Contagious enthusiasm

The three words that best describe the late Arthur William Benjamin (1945–2015) are generosity, compassion, and joyfulness. If as, according to French Renaissance philosopher Michel de Montaigne, ‘the surest sign of wisdom is constant cheerfulness’, then my friend and mentor, Arthur, was indeed a wise man. He endured many tough challenges in the time I knew him, but never complained; indeed he always had a smile on his face and was always thrilled to see me. His most often used expression was ‘wonderful!’, said with great enthusiasm and joy. Arthur saw the wonder in all things, and his positivity was infectious. He had an enormous influence on my life and on the lives of many others. The lessons I learnt from Arthur were not through a formal mentoring relationship, but through working together, first at the Space Theatre, then later as board members of HOM; many years of friendship; countless conversations; and observing how he lived his life and interacted with people.

In the time that I knew him, Arthur suffered some severe health challenges. His condition demanded that he had to have a kidney transplant, and the search went out for a suitable donor, ideally a family member. In the truly generous Benjamin family tradition, his sister Margaret immediately

offered to donate one of her kidneys to save her brother’s life. And so Arthur was given a second chance at living, which he embraced fully. Regular medical treatment and support became a routine matter for him, but never dampened his lust for life. A side-effect of the kidney deterioration was damage to his vision. All his life, Arthur had been an avid reader, but now this was reduced to reading very slowly with the help of a magnifying glass. Facial recognition also became difficult. Once again, he never complained, and continued to ‘see’ wherever he gazed.

What goes around, comes around

During his retirement, Arthur lost his long-term accommodation. Years before, Arthur had been left the old family house in Bridgetown. At the time, he had his own accommodation, and he allowed his younger brother and extended family to continue to live there. He could have claimed the house back at any time for himself but never did so, and because of financial struggles within that family, he never demanded rent from them to help ease his own position. At Arthur’s funeral, I discovered that his brother had been an orphan and was adopted into the family. Arthur had only ever spoken about him as a true brother, and his brother being looked after in the family home was more important to Arthur than his own needs.

His most often used expression was ‘wonderful!’, said with great enthusiasm and joy. Arthur saw the wonder in all things, and his positivity was infectious.

9 Extract from Arthur’s family memoirs, *Dancing with Mary and Billy*



And then, the universe returned this gift, and others took care of him when he needed it most. Immediately on hearing the news that his Uncle Arthur needed somewhere to live,

his nephew – his sister's son – invited him to join his family in their home. When Arthur queried this invitation, his nephew replied, 'Uncle Arthur, we always wanted you to be living with us. It was always part of our plan to have you.' Arthur spent many years with his nephew's family and enjoyed engaging with the two children and assisting them with their homework tasks and with negotiating personal challenges. When the family had to move to another house, Arthur moved with them. And when they decided

to move to Saint Helena, Arthur was immediately invited to live with his sister Margaret and her daughter Merlyn, which he did until the end of his days. I have fond memories of visiting my mentor and friend in all these different homes. It didn't matter to Arthur if the space in which he lived was spacious or cramped, he was always content. He was able to be 'at home' wherever he found himself, for people and relationships were the most important thing for him. Maybe his childhood experiences of constantly moving and having to adapt to change helped prepare him for later in life.

Arthur was a true man of service, always there for others. I first met him at The Space Theatre in Long Street, Cape Town – the first theatre in South Africa to defy the apartheid laws by having mixed casts and audiences. Arthur was a

stalwart on the theatre staff and became the administrator, responsible for managing the cash flow, accounting and wages. The theatre often experienced financial difficulties because the Censorship Board banned and closed many shows. The theatre director at that time, Brian Astbury, tells a story of one of these times. Arthur told Brian that there were no funds left to pay the theatre staff and actors that week. They felt quite desperate as many of the staff had been working with reduced wages for some time in order to keep the theatre going. Arthur said he would make a plan, and the next day, when Brian came into work, Arthur said he was able to get the funds to pay everyone; someone had made a private donation. Weeks later, Brian discovered that Arthur had made the donation from his own life savings. He could not witness others experiencing financial hardship.

As the saying goes, 'what goes around comes around'. Many years later, when Arthur had no funds left and was staying with and being cared for by family members, he was concerned that he was becoming a financial burden. He wanted to be able to make some sort of monthly contribution to the food bill, at the very least. Because of his reputation of service to others and hours given to voluntary work, friends stepped in to help him live comfortably and contribute to his family. Arthur was able to accept this gift, as he lived his life with the philosophy passed on by his parents, that when you are able, you share what you have, and then others, in turn, might also choose to share what they have with you.

Swimming against the tide

To challenge peer opinion and to go against what is considered the norm takes courage. Arthur was a man of courage. He believed passionately in the power of education

He was able to be 'at home' wherever he found himself, for people and relationships were the most important thing for him.



to provide opportunities for personal and community development, and ultimately to make the world a better place. And he walked the talk. While working full time, he had the discipline to study through Unisa for a degree, and later acquired funding to do postgraduate study at Cardiff University in Wales, UK.

In the late 1970s in South Africa, the generally accepted credo within the liberation movement was 'liberation before education'. Youth were encouraged to make their schools and communities ungovernable, and many were recruited to cross the borders to join the liberation forces. As a proud black man, Arthur sympathised with many of the arguments and views expressed at the time; he was also clear and strong in his critique against this call to arms. His personal credo was 'education before liberation', and he openly debated this with fellow workers. For him education was the clear route to political and economic freedom for all in a democratic South Africa. He observed that many of the liberation movement's leadership and members in exile were receiving an excellent education at universities around the globe, and did not approve of a situation in which the youth, the foot soldiers, were out of school, on the streets, and serving in the frontline against the police and army. He feared that most of these young people – often referred to as the lost generation – would never recover from sacrificing their education and living within a culture of extreme violence practised on all sides, and that a democratic country would eventually suffer from this state of affairs, with high rates of violence, unemployment, and an unskilled workforce. Arthur's views and independent thinking did not make him popular amongst struggle activists. But this did not bother him, and he stuck with what he passionately believed in. He never formally joined a party or movement, but worked quietly and

constructively behind the scenes, providing opportunities for others, mainly through arts education.

Arthur was good at developing friendships that cut across class, religious, cultural, and racial divisions. One such friend was a young white woman, an opera singer who taught music at a government, all-white, Afrikaans-speaking school. Indeed, this was the school of choice of many National Party ministers and members of parliament for their children. Arthur's friend one day told him that there was an empty drama post at this school and if he was interested in applying, she would highly recommend him and arrange an interview with the school principal. Arthur said that this sounded like an interesting opportunity. At the time, the school had no black members of staff; it was officially against apartheid policy to employ any.

I was shocked that Arthur would be prepared to work in a white school, especially one attended by many conservative politicians' children. And I was sceptical of his chances of being interviewed, let alone getting the job. But Arthur saw the world differently. He saw

He saw this as an extraordinary opportunity to develop powerful relationships with children who would otherwise only experience interacting with black men and women who were employed as family servants and gardeners. And ultimately, for Arthur, children were children, not black or white.



this as an extraordinary opportunity to develop powerful relationships with children who would otherwise only experience interacting with black men and women who were employed as family servants and gardeners. And ultimately, for Arthur, children were children, not black or white.

The music teacher handed Arthur's impressive CV to the principal, and insisted, 'You have to secure the services of this wonderful teacher.' There was no mention of race in the paperwork and, of course, the surname Benjamin did not

give anything away. As far as the principal was concerned, Arthur Benjamin must be a white man. Having looked at the CV, the only concern he voiced was that Arthur could be overqualified for the post. And so he agreed to an interview.

So that she could do the introduction, Arthur's friend accompanied him to the interview. She described the principal's face when Arthur stepped into his office. His jaw dropped. The very dark-skinned man who stood before him had applied for a teaching post at his

racially segregated school. To describe the beginning of the interview as tense would be an understatement, but the music teacher observed how, the minute Arthur started conversing with the principal, the man relaxed – because Arthur was totally relaxed. He spoke with the principal as an

equal and showed great interest in the man and his school. He also spoke about how he envisaged working with the students. Arthur was given the post and spent many years at this institution, no doubt changing the attitudes of many staff members and students who, together with their families and parents, shared their love for this wonderful educator and human being.

Once again Arthur was not afraid of being unpopular and branded as a sell-out and reactionary. He had his own ideas about how change could be effected, and about his place in the process of creating a free South Africa. While some were choosing weapons, bombs, or a burning tyre, Arthur believed that the pen is mightier than the sword.

Arthur never had children of his own, but through his marriage he had two daughters, and later their children were his grandchildren. In the broader sense, he had too many children to count. Arthur took a keen interest in each child and his enthusiastic interactions showed the depth of care he felt. At the theatre where he worked for several years, a group of young theatre workers always gathered around him in his office. At the children's home where he was a deputy-director for a long while, he became a father figure for many abandoned youngsters. Eventually, after retiring from the children's home, Arthur taught drama and theatre studies at a high school opposite his house in Athlone. Groups of students came to have tea with him at home, and when they left school, many stayed in touch and continued to visit him. Each student knew that Arthur would make time for them, no matter what else was going on in his life. His relationship with youngsters was always based on their development as human beings and not on how they performed in a particular subject or activity.

His relationship with youngsters was always based on their development as human beings and not on how they performed in a particular subject or activity.



A disciplined communicator

We all know the power of communication to heal and repair or to create much damage. Arthur was a disciplined communicator. He maintained his position, dealt with the situation, and moved on graciously. I learnt much from his dignified way of dealing with life's challenges and obstacles. I remember how, in the later years of his relationship, his partner sometimes insulted and spoke badly of him in our presence. Arthur never rose to the bait, but always stayed calm and focused, clear and insightful in his responses. Even when his partner asked him to leave the house she owned, and friends expressed their anger about the situation, he never said a bad word against her; instead, he spoke with love and appreciation of her and for what she had given him in the past. Bitterness was never an option for Arthur.

Arthur could also be a straight talker and challenging to oppose if the situation warranted it. He believed in doing and saying what was right, even if this meant possibly losing a friendship. I witnessed this one day, when a close friend visited him with his new partner. Arthur was upset by how his friend had left his wife and how he was treating her. He would have preferred a private discussion with his friend, as he had some straight talking to do. But he thought it was important to speak openly and honestly and he said what

he had to say in front of his friend's new partner. Arthur's friend could not handle being challenged in this way and did not see him again. On the one hand, Arthur regretted this and wished it could have been different, but he stood by the need to express himself authentically, even at such a cost. 'What I said, needed to be said. And it was said in true friendship, even if it was not received that way.' I learnt from this that sometimes tough love is also necessary in honest and open communication.

All his life, Arthur Benjamin quietly worked towards building a new, more humane society. He was one of many invisible South Africans working in their communities. He showed me how, 'by the smallest of one's actions one can restore some sense of order to the world'.¹⁰

May his legacy live on!

He was one of many invisible South Africans working in their communities. He showed me how, 'by the smallest of one's actions one can restore some sense of order to the world'.

10 From *A Gentleman in Moscow*, by Amor Towles





MY KARATE MENTORS

Richard Kloosman

It's not kung fu

As I was born in 1972, I grew up in the era of 'bioscope' and then VHS/Beta films. My father used to take us to two different cinemas in the Strand (Western Cape): in Oosterlig Street and Brewery Road. The cinemas mostly showed double feature films: one would be an action thriller, and you could almost guarantee that the other would be what was

erroneously called a 'karate film' (locally pronounced 'karattie filim'). However, what we really got to see was a kung fu film. That was where my love for martial arts came from. I was fascinated with the almost graceful way the fighters had of beating someone up, and their ability to face anyone, block strike, and 'fly away' from the trouble. Even when I found out that our neighbour's son got a black belt in karate, I was not impressed. It was not kung fu, and in kung fu movies, the guys wearing karate suits were always the bad guys. My kung fu dreams never got fulfilled as a young boy. Someone

Sensei Paulse was not a big man, but he had big fists for his size, as well as an unbelievably strong punch, something we stayed away from as much as we could. However, what I remember most about him was his commitment to us.

once gave me a book about the Tai Chi martial art style, but it was not what I was looking for, which was what I saw on the big screen. And where I grew up, there were no martial art schools to go to.

In 1987, I went to Macassar Senior Secondary School where I met Ricardo April. As we came to know one another better, I found out that he did karate. At that time, I was still watching Jackie Chan movies, but I was no closer to kung fu than before. So I thought, why not go with Ricardo to a karate class to see what it was all about? It then turned out that my circle of friends at school as well as two others who went to another school, also wanted to go. Thus started my journey with karate and, in particular, Kyukushin Kai karate.

Sensei Paulse – my first karate coach

In the first class of my karate career I was a bit underwhelmed with the venue, a classroom in a school. Sensei (teacher) Paulse set us into seiza, which is a kneeling position, and read us the rules of Kyukushin Kai karate and those of his dojo (place of training). I cannot remember much about the rules, but something that struck me was a section in which he promised not to teach us any eastern religious beliefs, which I was glad about because I always took my Christian beliefs seriously.

Sensei Paulse was not a big man, but he had big fists for his size, as well as an unbelievably strong punch, something we stayed away from as much as we could. However, what I remember most about him was his commitment to us. I found out that he lived in Grassy Park on the Cape Flats and had to drive the distance to Macassar twice a week, and then he only asked a minimum amount of money for his classes. Often, we could not pay even that. He made us feel that we had to be in class, since he made such a sacrifice to come to



us. Sometimes there were only three or four students in his class, but that did not stop him. He had made a commitment to his students, and that was that.

During my four to five years of training with Sensei Paulse, I made brown belt. I also got a second place in a Western Province tournament and went on to make the Western Province team. It was during the Western Province tournament and the South African tournament that I saw for the first time the type of skill that a person could possess if they put in the time. I was in awe of my teammates. Although I will always admire the kung fu style of fighting for its gracefulness, I found that it was no longer as much in my mind.

One of the most enduring memories I have of my time with Sensei Paulse is when we graded to brown belt. When sensei brought some black belt students from his other dojos for this grading, we knew that we were in trouble. In Kyukushin karate, the gradings are full contact fighting affairs, but only after you have gone through warm-up, basics, kata and combination punching – which leave you reeling – then the real fighting starts. At the grading, I was knocked off my feet by one of our own black belt students; I just remember feeling very light and then falling to the floor. I also had the misfortune of fighting against another black belt student and knocking his legs out from under him, and so he chased me around, trying to get me back for making him look bad. Luckily Sensei stopped the fight and we changed over before I got knocked down some more. When we finished the grading, I felt as if I was invincible; anyone could come now, I was ready for any fight! For some, karate might seem like needless brutality, but in all my time as a karateka (karate practitioner) I never saw anyone get seriously injured as happens in rugby, for instance. After fights everyone was friendly and laughing – it was the strangest phenomenon, fighting that ended in friendship.

Sensei Paulse continued to be unwavering in his commitment to us and our development as karateka, but we were becoming young men and practising on a Saturday afternoon started to weigh heavily on us. So, we began to stay away from some of his classes, which turned into staying away altogether. The way we treated him always haunted me: not doing the honourable thing by telling him that we had new and other priorities in life. However, my interaction with Sensei Paulse will end on a better note; this comes later in my story. Suffice to say, he made a deep impression on me in terms of his commitment, and this affected my own practice later in my life – first as a volunteer with Hearts of Men (HOM), and again later, when I started to work for them. I had to drive a fair distance to Ashton, for instance, and sometimes when I arrived there nobody pitched up for sessions. I was not discouraged, because I started to understand that when you work with people, they will disappoint you, and that you do not do something for your sake, but for theirs.

Sensei Neil and Seiki Kan

I have always been an active person, and played almost all the sports the school had to offer. At primary school I signed up for soccer since my mother would not allow me to play rugby. Many years later, a friend invited me to join his soccer club and so I started playing soccer for a while. It was the first

I started to understand that when you work with people, they will disappoint you, and that you do not do something for your sake, but for theirs.





Richard and Sensei Paulse

time since leaving karate that I was doing some sport again, and I enjoyed it very much. When I got married, I decided to leave sport again and was fully into married life. After the birth of my first child I quite by chance met the person who would have the biggest impact on my karate career: Sensei Neil van Zyl. It was after lunch one day, and I was coming up the stairs to the hearing aid place where I worked. A colleague was on the stairs speaking to an employee at a nearby financial services office, and I overheard my colleague complimenting this man on his karate skill. 'We are all just trying our best,' the man replied. I asked the man (Sensei Neil) where he was practising his karate and he said that he had a dojo at a primary school hall, and that I was welcome to come and check them out.

When I told my wife about the meeting and the invitation,

she said nothing was stopping me; she knew I would love to go back to karate. So, one Monday evening I went to Sensei Neil's dojo. He was a fourth dan karate instructor at the time, just as Sensei Paulse had been. The class was rather full of children and adults, something I was not used to. Sensei Neil greeted me and we started with warm-ups and practice kicks and punches. I really sweated that first night back in karate class. I had not been aware that I was so out of shape. I did not have any belt on and afterwards Sensei Neil asked me whether I was a black belt. I think he was impressed with the way I moved (thanks to Sensei Paulse). I replied that I left karate at brown belt and I was allowed to start again at brown belt. What I could not have anticipated that night, back in a karate class, was that I was starting a journey that I have continued on for almost 18 years. And thus, I have gone from a Kyukushin Kai Kan full contact karate fighter to a Seiki Kan Goju Ryu student of Karate Do (the way of the empty hand).

When I met Sensei Neil, my first impression was of a man who was very modest about his experiences, qualifications and karate knowledge. As I said before, the first words I heard him say were, 'We are all just trying our best.' Sensei Neil was also very up front in his manner. I am a reserved person and do not give my opinions easily, while I experienced him as someone who, in my opinion, said things a bit too easily and even inappropriately from time to time. But as I grew to know and understand him better over the years, I saw a man who did not change, and who never pretended to be someone else. It is better to say inappropriate things than to speak behind a person's back or pretend to be a friend.

Sensei Neil's dojo gave me a totally different view of karate. His senior student, Sensei Pietman, was a man with probably the most technical karate brain of anyone I have met. When Sensei Pietman first saw my techniques and how I moved, he

was critical, saying that I left myself vulnerable to attack. I was a bit offended, since in Kyukushin Kai we were hard, fast and to the point, but we did not have a 'leave no gate' mantra. It soon became apparent that I needed to understand the nature of the Seiki Kan way, which is very methodical and leaves no access to counter-attack. I also had to get used to no full contact fighting and in general, no competition fighting at all. This I did not really mind, since I was older and did not need all that physical movement.

Right from the beginning, Sensei Neil wanted to see what I was all about, so when we did some sparring from time to time, I got to fight against the higher belts and I could hold my own. We once went to a Boland tournament and I got silver. What I did not realise at that time was that Sensei Neil had plans for those whom he trained, while I did not necessarily have plans for my karate. I just enjoyed it. When I re-joined, I just wanted to get back to doing some exercise that was not boring, and picking up my karate was as good a way as any. I had not foreseen that the Seiki Kan method of karate would start to grow on me. In hindsight, it also prepared me and provided me with a tool to develop people, something that was furthest from my mind at the time.

After about four years in Sensei Neil's dojo, he asked me to test for black belt. Trying for a black belt was definitely something I had considered when I was doing Kyukushin Kai. It had also been something I dreaded, since Kyukushin Kai's gradings were intense and brutal. With Seiki Kan, as with the training methodology, the grading methodology was different. However, the level of anxiety for me was the same because of the katas that we had to do, which were a big focus point in Seiki Kan. At the same time, I was excited to grade for my black belt because I realised that I could reach a milestone in karate that few get to. Receiving my black belt

was one of the proudest moments of my life in sport. Sensei Neil had special belts made for me and two other candidates who passed the grading. Putting on the belt was a surreal experience. I still wear the black belt Sensei Neil gave me. You can have fancier belts made for yourself, but up until now I have not bothered.

Before Sensei Neil got my special belt, I bought a generic black belt because, as soon as I got to Shodan (first dan of the black belt), I knew what I had to do. I had to go to Sensei Paulse to tell him of my achievement and to apologise for how we had treated him by leaving his dojo without giving any reason. Sensei Paulse was so glad to see me. He even asked me whether I had received a certificate when I got my brown belt. He then gave me a signed certificate, saying I should just put in the correct date as he could not remember it. What a gentleman and an example of forgiveness and humility. Sensei Paulse taught me a valuable lesson in grace towards people. He also taught me that if you do not take yourself too seriously you will not get easily offended by the actions of others.

When I think back on how I got my black belt, what stands out for me is the way I achieved it. It was not the hard work or sacrifice involved, but the fact that I had picked up something that I had left off many years before, and just kept on doing it until the result came. In other words, if you persist at something for long enough, you will succeed. All we need to do is keep moving forward towards what we want to achieve. The result will take care of itself. This realisation has affected

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how I wish to live my life. I will stay in my calling, not looking around to see how fast others get to their destinations; my destination was tailor-made for me and is waiting.

Becoming a sensei

One evening at around the time I received my black belt, Sensei Neil asked me whether I had thought of starting a karate club. I was not sure how to answer because I had not considered it at all. Unbeknown to Sensei Neil, he

had a supporter in this idea. A friend from my church had read about my achievement in the newspaper, and he came to me one day and asked whether I could use my karate as a vehicle to work with some of the challenging children at a local primary school and teach them some discipline. I started thinking about the amount of commitment this would involve. Both Sensei Pause and Neil had to be in the class twice a week, prepare

At the time, I was a leader in the church, and it had become apparent to me that I had a love for teaching others and, more than that, a gift of making things understandable to people.

lessons and think about students' needs, and I was not sure whether I wanted that responsibility. I also knew that once I became a karate teacher, I would not be able to easily stop just because I no longer felt like doing it. As long as people join your class and are willing to come, they expect you to be there, and new people are joining all the time. My daunting

realisation was that a dojo would become my calling in life.

At the time, I was a leader in the church, and it had become apparent to me that I had a love for teaching others and, more than that, a gift of making things understandable to people. The word sensei means teacher, and it looked as though, in a sense, I was already set up to go this route. I had also started to become a bit frustrated with my work; it was a good job, but I wanted a change. These things all fed into this new scenario of opening a dojo.

I could not hold off making the decision forever, so I discussed it with my wife, and took the plunge. I told my friend that I would help him out with the children at the school, but that I would do it by starting a karate club and they could be invited to come – not labelled as problematic children. Thus, I became Sensei Neil's first student to open a dojo, with his dojo as the honbu dojo (head dojo). This development would have repercussions for my karate career which, again, I could not have anticipated.

The teachers of my teacher

I was born in the Strand area of Cape Town in 1972, and in the late 1970s my parents got an opportunity to rent a house in Macassar, so we moved there. South Africa was under the apartheid regime, with an increasingly unstable political climate. For a young man from Macassar to meet and be trained by two revered karate masters of Goju Ryu was highly improbable, but that was exactly what happened to me. A thread was woven between Macassar, Sydney (Australia) and Tokyo (Japan).

A couple of years after I opened my dojo, Sensei Neil invited one of his teachers to come to South Africa to visit and give training sessions. Kenshu Hideo Watenabe was a 9th dan Hanshi (exalted master) – and what an honour it was to



meet him. Although Japanese, he was (and still is) living in Australia, running a dojo called Goju-Ryu Karate-Do Mission International. At that time, I was under the false impression that Watenabe was Sensei Neil's main teacher, but that was not the case; I would meet his real teacher some years later. For Watenabe, 'form is very important, maybe more than function' Sensei Neil once explained. I was trained by him a couple of times, which was of course not much, and I cannot claim to be his student, but I was privileged to have had that opportunity.

Watenabe was a bit shorter than me and of slight build, which meant his karate suited me well. I was really impressed by this man and, as the saying goes, first impressions last. For me this was true. Even though I have heard that he has his critics, I still hold Watanabe in high regard and use his videos as examples to inform my own karate development.

Sensei Neil's main teacher turned out to be another Hanshi 9th dan – Kyoshi Yonemoto from Tokyo, Japan. The way in which Sensei Neil came to know Sensei Yonemoto makes for a fascinating story. One day, back in 1992, Neil went to a bookshop and saw in a magazine the story about a karate master teacher called Sosui Ichikawa Sensei. Ichikawa was a soldier in the Second World War and still had some bad feelings towards Americans, which made it hard for westerners to learn from him. Somehow, though, an Englishman, Chris Clifford, became one of his students and wrote the article. Neil then wrote a letter to the editor of the magazine and when Chris Clifford called Neil from England, he almost fell out his chair. In 1993, Chris invited Neil to England so that he could be introduced to some of Ichikawa's karate and meet one of Ichikawa Sensei's senior students, Kyoshi Yonemoto. Chris told Neil that if he saw Yonemoto's karate, he would be seeing Ichikawa's karate – it



Richard and Master Watanabe

was a mirror image. So, Sensei Neil went to England and met Chris Clifford at his home in Bromley in county Kent, about a 20-minute train ride from London. Two days later he met the man who has probably had the greatest impact on his karate career. Since Yonemoto likes the outdoors, Neil recalls receiving his first lessons in the open fields, 'between the cow pies', somewhere in Bromley. At that time, Sensei Yonemoto was a shiatsu massage specialist as well as a trained and practising acupuncture therapist. Sensei Neil remarked to me that because Yonemoto was trained in those two fields, he probably had a better understanding than most of how the human body works, which would help him know how and where to hit.





Richard and teachers Yonemoto and Neil

By the time Neil went to England, he was already a black belt and had about 20 years of karate experience. He told me that at that time in his karate career he had been looking for something concerning his martial art, but he was not sure what he was looking for. He added that he is still looking for something, and hopes that he does not find it, otherwise his karate will be in trouble. In Neil's search, he tried various styles such as Okinawan Goju Ryu and Tenshin Kan karate, a form of the Shotokan style. He then tried the Japanese Goju Kai. When Neil saw the Goju Ryu of Ichikawa, as taught by Sensei Yonemoto, his understanding of karate was shaken. He saw that Ichikawa's Goju Ryu karate is exactly what the name Goju suggests – the hard ('go') and soft ('ju') way of karate as opposed to many other styles, which are stationary, hard and unbending. Neil had to evaluate what his 20 years of karate meant to him because it looked like he had to give it all up if he wanted to adopt the Ichikawa system.

Sensei Yonemoto first came to South Africa in 2011 and continued to visit over the years. Neil told me that he could

not believe that his teacher would follow him to South Africa. He recalls how he felt that Yonemoto did not really like him at first and he never really understood why the master eventually became his teacher. Neil sees himself to be not unusually talented as a karateka; he always says he is only trying his best to improve. I just want to interrupt the story here to say that if you put in the amount of time, energy, study, dedication and money into an art as Sensei Neil put into karate, talent becomes irrelevant. You will be good enough to pass those learnings to the next generation so that they can have a better understanding of the art.

Another surprise for Neil was that, without being asked, Yonemoto gave Neil's dojo the name it has today. The name Yonemoto gave was Seiki Kan, which means 'excellent' or 'correct spirit school', a very apt name in many senses. Neil says that this name was not given because his karate was so good, but as a goal to strive for. For me, the name means a lot in my spiritual understanding of life.

Neil describes Yonemoto as a brilliant teacher whose method is to force the student to work out what is being taught. This means that he teaches to a certain level of understanding and knowledge, and if the student does not have that, he or she should not be in the class.

When Neil received approval to teach Yonemoto's style of karate, he was given a document on which is Yonemoto's palm print and a poem with the words, 'the one who knows it is below the one who understands it, but the one who enjoys it is above them all'. According to Yonemoto, knowing and understanding an art fall short of the goal of the art if you cannot also enjoy what you do. This, I believe, holds true for just about everything a person does in life. If we cannot get some sort of joy from our daily tasks or what we keep ourselves busy with or what we study, what is the point of pursuing what we do?



Richard and Yonemoto

Through Sensei Neil, I have been unusually blessed to have received training from not one but two Japanese master teachers. As I described earlier, I had already had the honour of meeting Kenshu Hideo Watenabe. When I first met Sensei Yonemoto, I did not know what to think. He looked serious and did not seem to acknowledge me; he barely glanced my way when I was introduced to him. It was during his second visit to South Africa that I got to know him better. I was invited to a social event at Sensei Neil's house, and as the evening unfolded, I had the opportunity to meet the ordinary man for the first time – not the sensei, the karateka. Many people all over the world want to know Kyoshi Yonemoto for his karate and because he was the student of Sosui Ichikawa. But he is an interesting man in his own right; a people's person, despite his Japanese manner, which seems aloof, cold and distant. In a social setting he is never shy to teach an impromptu karate lesson or to explain a move in a kata. At Sensei Neil's parties it was, therefore, not unusual to find a social discussion in one corner and a karate demonstration in another.

Sensei Yonemoto once told me about some of his daily activities. He gets up early, tunes into a foreign radio station, for example Portuguese or German, and then uses a dictionary to learn the language. When I asked him why

he was so interested in languages, he replied that getting invitations to certain countries has forced him to start learning some of the languages of these countries. But in recent times he has not travelled so much, due to his age and problems with his knees.

Sensei Yonemoto is not a karate jock or exhibitionist, but a methodical thinker who considers what works in karate as well as the best way to teach it.

Every time he is about to return home to Japan, he looks at me sternly and says in his broken English, 'You teacher, you study, do kata all the time. If you wrong, your student wrong.' However, the best piece of teaching advice he gave me was that in order to be a good teacher, I must first understand and copy my teacher; only then will I be able to express my own unique karate.

Adventure and structure

If I look back at my karate career, it could have been better. For example, if I had been able to do a full split, I would have been a much better karateka than I am in competition fighting. But I did my best with the type of body structure and personality I have. Maybe always looking at what we do not have is just an excuse for not taking a chance. Maybe we should just live our lives trying as many new things as we can, within reason. Life can be very formulaic and habitual, and while this provides us with structure, trying new things and finding new ways to express ourselves in the world provides a balance that includes adventure and excitement. My karate gave me adventure and excitement, but it gave me structure, too, and a tool with which I could influence others.

My karate gave me structure, too, and a tool with which I could influence others.





MENTORS AND MENTORING: A LIFETIME OF LEARNING

Nic Fine

The pen is mightier than the sword

Often the most influential people in your life are those who appear at critical junctures along your life journey. One such man was Alec Davidson, a Quaker who believed passionately in non-violence, a writer, and a director of a youth arts project

in London. It was the early 1980s and I had recently arrived to settle in the UK after refusing to serve in the South African Defence Force and its invasion into Angola. This was a very turbulent and violent time in the struggle for democracy and freedom in South Africa, and with the political future of the country being so uncertain, I never knew whether I would ever be able to return to my home, family and friends.

My first visit to Alec's organisation was to attend a job interview. It was for a three-month contract to direct an unemployed young people's national touring production and to develop a workshop to take

place with the audience after the show. What transpired at the interview was like nothing I had experienced before. It was a deeply personal and stimulating interaction, aimed at understanding who I was and what I believed in. The interviewers grilled me on the South African situation, my experience growing up in that country, and my views on the use of violence. Not all my views as a South African who had sympathy at the time for the armed struggle concurred with their philosophy of non-violence. But they had a profound understanding of the complexities of the different contexts and empathy for those caught up in the struggle. I knew that this was the kind of organisation I would love to work for. To my surprise I was offered the job, and after the three-month period was over, I applied for a permanent position and spent the following decade with them. It proved to be an incredible learning and growth period for me under the gentle and wise guidance of Alec Davidson who always believed that the pen – the spoken and written word – is mightier than the sword.

During the three-month contract, I decided to adapt Fatima Meer's book *The Trial of Andrew Zondo* for the stage. Andrew was sentenced to death in South Africa after, as part of the armed struggle, he planted a bomb that killed and maimed civilians. And so, we explored why a young person in another country would turn to violence. We explored arguments for and against the use of violence as a means to an end. The violent political struggle in Northern Ireland at the time meant that our topic was close to home for many of the participants. I was impressed by the Quakers' willingness to allow me to do this provocative piece and to explore really tough issues that run contrary to their belief system of pacifism. The experience taught me about tolerating opposing points of view, not feeling threatened by other positions and being willing to explore and

The experience taught me about tolerating opposing points of view, not feeling threatened by other positions and being willing to explore and understand different ideas.



understand different ideas. It showed me an alternative to fundamentalism – pushing one’s own view to the exclusion of all else.

Going beyond what you think is possible

Often the power of mentorship is actualised when your mentor sees something in you that you hadn’t yet seen in yourself. What they suggest or challenge you to do causes you to panic. You are filled with fear and dread, considering the possibility of failure. You resist with all your energy, saying, ‘What you are suggesting is impossible, indeed, mad! No ways will I or can I do that.’ That is exactly what happened when I started my fulltime employment within Alec’s organisation.

Alec was very perturbed by the growing levels of alienation and violence amongst young people in many of Britain’s densely populated inner-city environments. He wanted to bring them peacekeeping, mediation, and conflict resolution skills. At that time in the UK, there were no training resources with this focus aimed at youth. Alec saw the huge need and a gap in the market for such work to be developed and published. So, he proposed to me and my co-worker that this should be the sole focus of our job description over the next few years.

We agreed with him in theory that this work was needed, but vehemently disagreed that we were the people to drive his vision. Alec believed strongly that we were exactly the right people. We argued we didn’t have the required knowledge, skills or confidence to undertake such a daunting task. He felt we could do it and asked how he could support us and what training might be useful for us. And so, an amazing journey began, a journey that changed my life in many ways. My co-worker and I started out by drawing from our own experiences and researching anything we thought might be helpful in

creating these materials. Alec believed in action-research, so we developed workshops with young people in a variety of settings to try out the exercises, approaches, and ideas we had been developing before recording them.

After months of trial and error, and capturing all our work, we approached Alec with a proposal. By then, we were fully enrolled in Alec’s vision. We felt we could learn from work going on in other countries, where levels of violence and social issues were more pronounced than in the UK at that time. After much exploration and discussion, we decided that the United States of America (USA) would be a good place to visit. The USA, a huge and diverse country with a sophisticated prison system, prolific gun and weapon use in violent crime, high levels of inner-city gang activity, drug addiction and school dropouts, provided a context where we could learn more about the kind of work that is possible with the most challenging young people living in tough circumstances.

Alec immediately understood our need and promised to raise the required funds for the research trip. And so, after a year of developing materials and much learning, we embarked on another journey of discovery to the USA. I would never have believed it was possible to gain so much experience from just six weeks of work in a different environment. Our research turned out to be very much action-based, as we participated in some amazing programmes that changed our view of what is possible and showed us many new techniques and approaches.

Often the power of mentorship is actualised when your mentor sees something in you that you hadn’t yet seen in yourself.



Confronting prejudice

I was rather surprised to be going to the USA, as I had never had any desire to do so. While doing the research there made sense, I wasn't looking forward to meeting the people. I was heavily prejudiced towards Americans – I didn't like their politics and the way they showed little support for freedom and democracy in South Africa, and I thought they were loud, cocky, and abrasive people who saw themselves as the centre of the universe. Well, my perceptions and appreciation

I was inspired by the work I witnessed being done in prisons and in communities by individuals who were able to make a contribution to the lives of others despite their own tough circumstances.

of American society were strongly challenged by my experience of living and working alongside some wonderful, generous, and inspiring human beings. I discovered America to be a hugely diverse society – in terms of race, language and culture – in which people seemed to have the freedom and space to explore new ways of doing things. I was inspired by the work I witnessed being done in prisons and in communities by individuals who were able to make a contribution to

the lives of others despite their own tough circumstances, and by the high numbers of community volunteers. I felt ashamed of my prejudice and saw how easy it is to brand an entire nation and people based on the behaviour or actions of a few. Experiencing something first-hand can alter one's

perceptions for good. My exposure to American life gave me a completely different picture to the one I had carried around for many years. It was a good example of Alec's beloved action-research: experience it; do it – don't just read or think about it.

Surprise learnings

During the USA trip, I expected most if not all my learnings to take place either in witnessing the direct work of facilitators with youth, or in formal interviews with programme founders and leaders. But, again, I was surprised. I found that I was learning every moment of the day: from seeing how food was carefully prepared to how the safety of youth and volunteers was handled, how the days were scheduled, or how the facilitators conducted themselves. And I sometimes gained valuable insights in the unlikeliest of places. One such insight occurred in the middle of the night when I was standing outside in a dark forest far from any city. I was attending an outdoor camp, working on a 'youth at risk' programme with mainly young black and Hispanic men and women from New York. The process was led by a team of professional facilitators who were supported by adult volunteers drawn from the same community as the youth, as well as other volunteers from different parts of the USA who wanted to contribute or learn about the work being done. At night some volunteers or staff were always on duty to keep watch.

On this night I was on duty with an older grey-haired gentleman. He was a pleasant, easy-going man, and we passed the time chatting. I discovered that he was a board member of the organisation that was running the programme throughout the USA. He explained that he felt it was important for him to gain direct insight, at least once a year, into how the organisation was doing so as to avoid



creating a gap between the practitioners and the directors of the organisation. I was impressed by his words and the example he set. But what impressed me most was still to follow. I asked him what he did for a living. He replied that he was a High Court judge. I showed surprise that with such stressful and demanding work he still found the time to serve on the board of an organisation and walk around as part of security in the middle of the night. He explained that, as a judge, he often felt despair when repeat offenders appeared before him in court and he had to send them back into the prison system. He had seriously considered standing down as a judge, having asked himself the question, 'What purpose is there in sentencing young people into the prison environment, only to see the bulk of them return to stand in front of me again?' His work with this programme gave him hope that given the right intervention, followed by mentor support from their community, change for these youngsters was possible. Witnessing some of the breakthroughs these youngsters had made, despite their tough circumstances, had inspired him to continue with his legal work and lifted his feeling of despair. He also described how the stories told by these young men and women had given him a unique insight into the lives of people who appeared before him in court. He felt that his involvement with this programme had made him a much better judge. 'And that,' he concluded, 'is the reason that I am prepared to walk around in the middle of the night.'

The programme and this gentleman's perspectives and reasons for giving service taught me a great deal. I understood how important building community support and cohesion is, and that it should include not only local volunteers, but also police, penal, health and legal personnel. It gives them the confidence and the tools to engage with

challenging young people, and it shows them how important it is to have a strong community mentoring system in place. These participants can gain as much as, if not more than, the young people themselves. They gain hope and belief that they can turn the lives of young people around; they can take back their streets and feel safe once again.

At the top of the hill

Ron Bynam was a survivor and veteran of the Vietnam war. After having served, he had joined a successful organisation that conducted courses throughout the USA in powerful communication and personal transformation. Many years into their programme, they were approached by the community of Oakland, just outside San Francisco, to come and discuss the possibilities of addressing some of the challenges that community faced. The key issue identified was the lack of safety for women and the elderly, especially after dark. They considered their streets to be unsafe. Realising that their very own youth had formed gangs that controlled the streets, they said, 'What's happened to us? We brought these children into this world, and now we live in fear of them. We need to bring back control of our streets to feel safe again. We need to turn this situation around.' From this request, Ron and his colleagues saw an opportunity to make their work accessible to young people and to support communities that were challenged by youth crime, addiction and violence. And so, a powerful 'youth at risk' programme

The adults can gain as much as, if not more than, the young people themselves. They gain hope and belief that they can turn the lives of young people around.



was born, starting with the Oakland community in California, and gradually spreading to other states. There was a strong emphasis on training community volunteers to support the programme delivery and to set up ongoing mentorship

for the youth after the initial intervention.

I met Ron for the first time on my research trip to the USA and participated in the programme for youth from New York City. A couple of years later I met him again as a group of us were setting up this same initiative in the UK and, for the first few years, facilitators from the American programme mentored, trained and assisted us. Ron was attending one of our

programmes in England as course leader, and I was staffing and being mentored by members of Ron's team.

One early evening, during a break, Ron suggested we go for a walk, saying he would appreciate some company. I felt privileged to be able to spend some one-on-one time with this man, and a little daunted as well. I admired his skill, clarity, and charisma when working with youth; indeed, I secretly wanted to be exactly like him. In addition, I had seen movies and read books about the war in Vietnam, but I never imagined that I would spend time with someone who had been there.

Ron led me to the top of a steep hill, where we had a beautiful view of the valley that surrounded the outdoor centre where we were based in the north of England. We sat down on some large boulders and began a memorable conversation. First, Ron asked me about my life, if I had a

partner, any children. I shared some of my background and said I was recently married and had one young child. He also asked how I saw my future progression in this work. And then we sat in silence. I could see he was deep in thought.

I cast my mind back to when the staff team had arrived on site, a few days before the youth joined us, to prepare for their arrival. We were asked by the programme coordinator to introduce ourselves and do a check-in (to say how we were doing personally and how we were feeling about working on this programme). Ron's check-in surprised me. He had tears in his eyes and expressed how sad he was feeling. He didn't go into details but said he wanted to share with us that he had been going through a tough time, was feeling vulnerable, and would appreciate our support in the days ahead. Ron's sharing left an impression on me. I had always thought that, as a course leader, you should portray confidence and strength to encourage those you were leading. It was important to cover up feelings of sadness and fear, and to put on a brave face for the world. Ron, however, was willing to appear as an ordinary human being, with emotions and moods, just like the rest of us. I wondered how he would shape up, leading a tough course, while feeling like that. But he led superbly, demonstrating that showing vulnerability in leadership is indeed a strength, not a weakness. He was role modelling a different way of relating and communicating. His actions showed us that it is important not to attempt to cover up feelings, and encouraged us to be more authentic with one another in our communication.

And so, on top of the hill we sat in silence. After a while I asked him about his family. He said he wanted to share his story with me, as it was relevant to my situation: newly married, with a young child, and yet ambitious in my career. He described how privileged he had been to have had

He led superbly, demonstrating that showing vulnerability in leadership is indeed a strength, not a weakness.

such a wonderful career, working with brilliant colleagues, travelling widely, and knowing that his work made a difference in people's lives. And then he shared his deepest regret – the breakdown of his relationship with his wife and consequently missing out on being present as a father to his daughter, on witnessing her growth from babyhood into young adulthood. He shared how, after much effort, he had managed to re-establish a relationship with his adult daughter, but those missing years could never be reclaimed. Not having the closeness and support of family filled him with a deep sadness and a feeling of loneliness now that he was slowing down with his work. He encouraged me to always put my relationship and parenting first; career, he insisted, must come second. That was not the mentoring I was expecting from Ron. I thought we would discuss work, techniques, strategies, and new ideas. But what I received from this man I looked up to was ultimately of more value. It had a direct impact on my personal and family life. The interaction at the top of the hill, between a young man and a mentor, still resonates with me today.

Age is just a number

Steve Angell was one of the hosts on our journey through the USA. We spent five days staying with Steve and accompanied him and his team to an Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) workshop in an upstate New York correctional services prison. Prior to our arrival, his voice on the phone sounded young, enthusiastic and friendly, and we pictured a young, or possibly middle-aged, man. We arrived at his house in the woods after dark, knocked, and heard footsteps approaching from within. An old man with grey, thinning hair and stooped shoulders greeted us. We told the old man that we had come to stay with Steve Angell and asked if he was at home.

He chuckled, replied that Steve was indeed at home, and ushered us in, leading us to the kitchen. After a long pause, he stretched out his hand and introduced himself with a wide smile, 'I'm Steve, and you must be Fiona and Nic. You weren't expecting such an old man as me, were you?' And, in truth, we were not. Working with long-term prisoners is a tough job, and facilitating an intensive workshop focusing on violence and peace-making over three full, long days is not usually an undertaking for an old man, we thought. But that was before meeting Steve! I will never forget his shining eyes, huge sense of fun, unbelievable enthusiasm, and boundless energy.

Over the next few days, we worked inside the prison, learning many lessons that I have never forgotten. One observation that has stuck with me was how the facilitating team of three outsiders (community volunteers) and three insiders (prisoners who had graduated in this training) was multigenerational and mirrored the participants in age, situation, race and class. After one exhausting day, we were sitting on the lawn outside the prison, waiting for our lift back to Steve's home. It was late, and I was ready to climb into bed. Steve jumped up and suggested that we play a game. He wanted to show us one of the icebreakers he used to get everyone to relax. So, there we were, running around like kids, having fun in the dark. I stared at Steve in amazement and wondered what kept him going.

The following day, the workshop completed, he invited us to walk with him in the forest around his home. My colleague opted to rest and write in her journal. At the time, I would have liked to have done the same, but I am so pleased I took up the offer to accompany Steve. We walked in silence for quite a while. I then asked him how he got involved in AVP. Steve explained that he retired at 60 after a lifetime career





Nic Fine and mentor, Steve Angell

in social work. He and his wife moved out of the city to live in the countryside, looking forward to their retirement years, spending time in nature and travelling together. And then his life partner passed on after an illness and he was suddenly left in a secluded house all on his own, their dreams for the future shattered. He knew he had to do something to deal with his grief and depression. He needed a new career, to make a new beginning – not that simple in your sixties.

He explained that he had always been a committed Quaker and had heard of this fledgling prison project initiated by the Quakers. He signed up as a volunteer and, in time, became a senior mentor and trainer, working in communities and prisons all over the United States, and eventually around the world. Steve spoke straight from the heart. I was not used to an older man being so open with me.

Years later, I was privileged to work alongside Steve in a British prison and to host him in my home. What a pleasure that was. I learnt so many things about facilitation and

transformation from him, too many to detail here. But most of all, I learnt that we are never too old to contribute, to change direction, to start afresh, to innovate, and to have fun! Eventually, after two decades of doing AVP workshops, Steve retired in his eighties. If ever there was a man who lived up to a saying by Rabbi Nachman, 'It is forbidden to be old', it is Steve. As TS Eliot once said, 'I don't believe one grows older. I think that what happens early on in life, is that at a certain age one stands still and stagnates.' Steve Angell certainly never stood still and stagnated! Larry Apsey (a founder of AVP) believed that our world will destroy itself unless we learn and practice 'the arts of peace'. He believed that peace begins with the individual. Steve was one such individual who led the way.

Around the world in 22 years

Who would have predicted that the youth service training materials we developed, and that were published in 1992 in manual form, would travel around the globe, be translated into several languages, and then be re-published 22 years later? My colleague Fiona Macbeth and I hadn't even believed that we were the people who should be writing the materials. But as I said before, Alex Davidson believed in us and in the project. He saw the need for the materials in the United Kingdom and Europe, but not even he thought they would be published in the USA, where we had gone to research new approaches and to learn from the Americans.

The first publication was by the National Youth Agency in the UK. Then, after the revolution in and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the materials were translated and published in Croatia for use in the youth service of this newly created independent state. Then New Society Publishers requested the rights to publish the materials in the USA and Canada.

We were amazed that what we had created after going to research and study there was seen as useful within their society. Then the biggest surprise of all came after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Empire. A Russian youth agency requested New Society Publishers to translate the materials into Russian and to publish a special version for them. We thought that ended a decade of surprising success in the spread of our modest work; but more was to come. In 2014, 22 years after the first publication (now out of print) a London publishing house, Jessica Kingsley, approached us to publish in the UK an update of the original manual. We were astonished that our work was still considered relevant, two decades later.

This has taught me about what is possible when someone believes in you and sees a quality that you might never recognise in yourself. It also taught me the power of enrolling (or, as in our case, pulling and tugging) people in your vision, even when, at first, they can't see it. Alec believed in this project. He could not have predicted the scope of its success, but he believed enough to motivate and cajole us into seeing it through.

The role of the elder

Another legacy Alec left was to demonstrate the important role an elder plays in holding the space for younger people to do their work and to develop into leaders themselves. Creating safe spaces for others to make mistakes, have fun, be creative, push boundaries, and express themselves, and being remunerated at the same time is a great gift to give people. When I reflect on the numerous organisations I have worked in, I recognise now that each had an elder in a 'holding' role. At the time I took these directors and coordinators for granted – they were just doing a job. But as I

found myself stepping into leadership positions, I realised the crucial role these men and women had played in my life and my development. While I was certainly working extremely hard – long hours and often away from home – with the elders in place, I didn't have to concern myself with continued funding or paying the bills. Being sheltered from these concerns meant I could get on with facing the challenges of the job. Now that I am an elder myself, I remember with appreciation this contribution Alec and other elders made to my development, and this motivates me to give back, to give others the same gift of space and time.

A key role in leadership is to bring other leaders through. As a young leader, I would often feel threatened or challenged by members of the group I was leading, and would become defensive, clinging to any authority I had. This approach, of course, stimulated conflict, especially with others who wanted to lead and have more influence. Later, as a more mature leader, I concentrated on having a much more fluid approach; I allowed and, indeed, encouraged others to lead. Alternating leadership between people prevents us from becoming attached to and

Everyone was supportive of whichever leader was in place. Rotating leadership created a healthy culture of cooperation and support and our motto became 'Support the leader to be the best leader possible'.



stuck in our positions. It removes potential conflict among people who find themselves competing with one other to become leaders themselves.

I am particularly proud of a school-based project I helped establish over two decades ago. I led the project for the first seven years, while the facilitation team and programme protocols were being developed. And then, once the programme was reasonably stable and team members had developed sufficient experience, I stepped aside, and we started a three-year leadership rotation process. Every individual in the team realised that they would have an opportunity to step into the hot seat. The thinking that prevailed was, 'Why give the leader an unnecessarily hard time? If I do, maybe people will do the same for me, when my turn comes around.' Because of this, everyone was supportive of whichever leader was in place. Rotating leadership thus created a healthy culture of cooperation and support and our motto became 'Support the leader to be the best leader possible'.

As an elder, my role is to mentor new leaders, giving them support whenever they ask. In this project I have now worked with five leaders, spread over the past 20 years. Whenever they invite me to staff on a programme, as an elder I am there to support the process and the leadership, working under the instruction of the current team leader. This swapping of roles and functions, when made clear, works well. Leadership is not seen primarily as a position – it is a place to serve.

Older and younger men having conversations that matter

The first time I experienced sitting in a circle with older men and younger men together was during a community-based youth mentoring programme for teenagers. It was decided

to split the young men and women into separate groups for one day. The focus of the day was on personal health and hygiene, sexuality and sex, relationships, and body image. The plan was to come together at the end of the day to share the experience of working separately and the conversations that had been had. This presented a rare opportunity for two generations of men to sit and have a conversation together, free to ask questions, discuss difficult and challenging issues, and for the young men to listen to the elders' experiences and mistakes. Older men also had the opportunity to ask questions of the younger generation in the room and to hear their views on many issues. It was a day of free-flowing conversation held in a non-judgemental environment, without shame, condemnation, or advice-giving. At the end of the day, both groups shared how valuable these separate spaces had been. They agreed that many of the discussions would not have taken place in the larger, combined group.

That day I also noticed that the young women were more comfortable and showed more maturity when sharing ideas about sexuality and sex in the larger group. The young men, who had showed composure and focus during the day when sitting with the adult men, suddenly became distracted, awkward and embarrassed in front of the women. I saw two quite different sides to the young men – serious and focused during the day, and silly and disruptive at the end. It was evident that they were not yet ready to have these conversations in front of women. This experience influenced my decision, many years later, to become part of setting up mentoring programmes especially for young men. On these five-day intensive programmes we always include at least one full evening of what we call 'body talk', during which the older men facilitating and the younger men participating share in a conversation around our bodies, sex and sexuality.



Mentoring Oliver

Modern technology has opened the way for mentorship to occur virtually. Over the past year or so, I have had the privilege to mentor a young father who lives in another country, far away from where I live. Oliver, a social work master's student, is passionate about developing programmes to support young boys through to manhood. He is also committed to forming support circles with other young fathers. His hope that there will be a rite-of-passage

programme available for his own two sons when they reach adolescence is partly what has driven him to begin a process of creating a community circle for young boys. This takes me back 20 years to when my two sons were young boys, and I started a programme for young men at their school in preparation for the time when my sons would be ready to participate. Mentoring Oliver on his journey is one way for me to hand down the knowledge and experience I have gained in this work, from one generation to the next.

Oliver gifted me with a poem. I share it with his permission.

'So much gratitude for you stepping in and holding your role as mentor to me. Can't imagine going through all of this without you. Thank you from my heart and soul.' (Oliver Jacobson, Longmont Colorado, USA)

A POEM FOR A MENTOR

I looked upon a grave abyss
Canyon dark with splintered shale
Trembling as I looked upon my way
Into the dark, the land of shadows and soul

I felt a hand on my shoulder
Heavy and strong
A voice gentle and firm
It is time, I will see you on the other side

And darkness took me in, bathed me in night
As I descended into the rocky land that would be my grave
Ghosts and ghouls, wolves and bears called out in the night

Lost in the dark, I would hear the solitary roar of a golden lion,
You are not alone
I am waiting for your return
You have the strength to find your way home

And after passing through the labyrinth
Paying the boat man his golden coins
I felt the land moving upward
Eyes blind, with bloody hands
I scrambled up the rocky slope and slowly the sky began to lighten

I reached the top of those canyon walls
As the sun was born above the horizon
Illuminated was a golden lion
The beast roared and my bones shook

And the sound brought life into the empty caverns
Of echoes and dreams
Songs of earth and magic
Ready to be sung and shared

*In this section, we
broaden the focus to
include the influence
and support from our
wider communities
such as schools, colleges,
universities, sports clubs,
and places of worship.*

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

In the previous two sections, we shared stories about the influence of home and of mentors on our lives. In this section, we broaden the focus to include the influence and support from our wider communities such as schools, colleges, universities, sports clubs, and places of worship.

I remember an experience I had with my piano teacher in primary school. My parents loved music and had a great collection of vinyl records that included classical, contemporary and jazz. We were fortunate enough to have a piano at home and, spotting my interest in playing the guitar and in music in general, my mother enrolled me in piano lessons. I was very excited. Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard were my heroes, and I was keen to play their music.

Well, the lessons began. My teacher taught me the basics and we moved on to some simple classical tunes. After a few weeks of persisting with these, I summoned up the courage to ask my teacher if he would show me the chords to 'Bachelor Boy' by Cliff Richard, a big hit at the time. It was a simple tune, with about four chord changes and would have taken little effort to show me, but my teacher responded with shock and horror, saying he would never tolerate 'such music' in his class. It was a waste of his time and my parents' money.

As you can imagine, his response disappointed me greatly. I decided if that was how he described my favourite

music I would reject his music, just to show him. I stopped practising my piano pieces and eventually he contacted my mother to inform her that I was making no progress and he recommended ending my lessons. My mother asked me if I wanted to stop and, yes, I did! She told me at the time that I would regret this decision later in life. She was right; today I still love playing the piano, but my playing is largely self-taught and limited, as I can't read much music.

Looking back on that experience, I realise the power a teacher has to build up, inspire and instil a love for a subject, or alternatively to destroy any young person's interest in it. If my piano teacher had accepted my simple request and struck a deal with me: 'Right, you practise the pieces I am giving you, and at the end of each lesson I will teach you one of your requests', he would have had me eating out of his hand, enthusiastic and committed to studying with him. But he rejected my interest and tried to squash my passion. And all he found in return was resistance and rebellion.

The experience was valuable in that it taught me a lesson I have never forgotten: as an adult, mentor, parent or teacher, be guided by and sensitive to the interest that a young person shows, the dreams they share, and the things that help to put a smile on their faces.





FOR THE LOVE OF TEACHING – AN INTERVIEW WITH ROY DAVIDS

I was born on 4 July 1967 and have lived all my life in Cape Town. My parents are also from Cape Town. My mom was a teacher. My dad was a manager for the City Council most of his life, and also experimented here and there with his own businesses. At one stage he had a trucking business that went bankrupt and we lost our house. We had to move into my grandmother's garage until my dad got back on his feet. Then later we moved to Mitchells Plain, which at that stage was very undeveloped. We stayed in Woodlands for a long time, and then we moved again, this time to Westridge, which is a bit of a status area in Mitchells Plain.

I attended primary and high school in Athlone. We moved to Mitchells Plain while I was in primary school, so I had to take two buses to and from school – from Athlone to Hanover Park, and then change buses to get to Mitchells Plain. My younger brother and I travelled together on the bus. On the way back, we would sometimes fall asleep and miss the bus stop near our house, so we'd get off at the stop just before the terminal and walk home. My primary school was the feeder school for a high school in Athlone, so even though we were now living in Mitchells Plain, my parents decided that I would continue my education where I was already settled.

Learning from mentors

My mom was my first mentor. I was very close to my mom. My dad worked night shifts quite a bit, so he would sleep during the day and I wouldn't see him at night, especially during my childhood. As the 'man in the house', I would try to look after my mom although I was just ten years old.

After I graduated from school, I went to Hewat College of Education. I had decided to become a teacher because it was what my mom did. My mom told me that teaching is only a half-day job and you can study further. What a lie that turned out to be! She taught at several primary schools during her career, which spanned 23 years. She ended up teaching at Mitchells Plain Primary School, which ironically was the first school that I taught at, but I didn't teach with her as she had left by then.

While I was at college, I realised teaching is a calling, it's not just a job. I felt called to teaching. My course was a higher diploma in education with a practical specialisation in physical education. We did all sorts of sports. I had started playing volleyball at school level and then joined a club in my first year of college. One of the guys that took me on as a mentee, in a sense, was our coach Gary Gabriels, a kind of father figure we all looked up to. A lot of youngsters playing in the volleyball team came from very disadvantaged backgrounds. Gary really took us in hand. He was also an incredible coach and I learnt so much from him in terms of coaching methods, specifically breaking down skills.

Besides the coaching, he taught me that volleyball isn't just about sport; it is also about life skills. Some boys in the team were wild, and he instilled discipline in them, which helped to carry them through. It certainly influenced me as well. When it was practice, it was practice; you could not just

do your own thing. He led by example in his coaching, but also in his lifestyle. He was a clean-cut, healthy living guy, and his example influenced me in my coaching and choosing sport as a career.

To this day, Gary – now working in Johannesburg – is still my mentor. I stopped playing volleyball for a long time, but about six years ago I decided to start again and I joined the CPUT (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) team as an outside member. Gary was the coach there, so we met up again, but now on much more of an equal footing. A lot of what I learnt from him, I then taught to others when I coached volleyball. After coaching our club ladies' team, I was asked to coach the Western Province ladies' team, but at that stage I had to refuse the offer. That's the kind of level I got to, after benefiting from Gary's coaching.

At college, several lecturers were also my mentors, especially the physical education lecturers. We spent an enormous amount of time with these men in the gym. Again, the sport and the discipline became a part of me, and I carried these over into my work. I suppose there have been many teachers, especially with me coming into the teaching profession, whom I looked up to and used as examples to follow. Mentorship took on a different role in the sense that they weren't necessarily teaching me; I was gleaning from them. Some didn't even necessarily know that they were a mentor to me, as I was just quietly observing how they went about their business.

Build relationships

After college I started teaching at Mitchells Plain Primary School. I was the physical education teacher and taught the whole school from Standard 1 (Grade 3) to Standard 5 (Grade 7) at that stage. We had no indoor facilities at all; everything was

done outside. But we made do. Some fantastic sports people came out of that era. One of the boys I coached in soccer and cricket ended up playing for Cape Town Spurs and then went on to play for Ajax Cape Town. Everything that Gary had taught me, I tried to pass on to others. I don't know if I realised it at that stage, but building relationships with children was becoming a lot more important to me than the content I was teaching. I used the content to build relationships and I think because of that, a lot of children kept contact with me long after I stopped teaching them. Years later, when I was teaching at Cape Town High School, I received an email from someone who asked, 'Are you Roy Davids who used to teach at Mitchells Plain Primary and ran the Scripture Union camp? I am now a minister at a church in America and I can still remember you doing Scripture Union with us during breaks.'

Be FAT

In college, I was very involved with the church, and I became a youth and worship leader. So there as well, there were a couple of people that I looked up to. My brother and his friend had just been on a Scripture Union national camp in Port Elizabeth, and came back raving about it. The camp structure was based on having groups of children led by someone who was out of school. All the leaders were Christian and modelled the Christian way of life to the youngsters that came in. My brother played tennis and squash and did so many outdoor activities

...building relationships with children was becoming a lot more important to me than the content I was teaching.



on the camp. This sounded extremely attractive to me, and I was a Christian and already involved in a church. I decided I wanted to get involved, so I joined Scripture Union in the Western Cape and, eventually, when I was out of school, became a camp leader.

If there is one person to whom I could attribute a whole lot of my way of doing things, then it must be Darryl who ran the teenage camps at Scripture Union. He taught me an incredible amount about how to build relationships. Some of his sayings still remain with me today, for example, 'Be FAT – Faithful, Available, and Teachable!'

Another saying that I learnt and now I live by is, 'Earn the right to speak.'

At home, my dad modelled 'being available', having time for others. Much to my mom's worry and angst, my dad was one of those people whom you could phone in the middle of the night or at any time if you were in trouble, and he would get up, jump in his car and be there for you. My dad passed on about four years ago. When people spoke at his funeral, the young nieces and nephews all said that when they spoke to Uncle Walter, they were always the focus of his attention and he would ask, 'How is it going at school? What are you doing?' That's something that I really took on from my dad, being available for people.

Also, my mom and dad's social life was incredible. People would just rock up at our house. For example, my parents would never invite people to their birthdays – people would just arrive and, before you knew it, the house would be full. My mom would be prepared with food and cake because she knew that people would arrive. I don't know if it was part

of their generation, or if it was the way my parents were with others.

Earn the right to speak

Another saying that I learnt and now I live by is, 'Earn the right to speak', which is a little bit cryptic, but it means showing someone that you care for them before speaking to them about an issue. So, you've got to walk the path with them a little bit. You've got to get to know them, you've got to be in tune with them. With children, for example, you've got to build that relationship before you can discipline them. At a school, you have the authority as a teacher, but it means very little when you haven't yet built a relationship with a child.

For example, there was an incident this year where a few of my students were talking in assembly. Afterwards, I scolded them in class. One boy argued with me in front of the class, saying, 'It wasn't only me, there were other people.' I said, 'Yes, but I'm speaking to you, and all I require is for you to say, "Sorry Mr Davids, I was talking, I apologise."' And I thought that was the end of my relationship with him because he was pretty angry. About ten minutes later, at the end of the class, I asked for help to bring some stuff from my car. And he was the first person to say 'I'll help'. To me that showed that I had earned the right to be able to chastise and discipline him. Even though he was cross, the relationship was there. And that is one of my keys to teaching: building and keeping relationships.

Pass it on

There were other people in Scripture Union whom I looked up to as mentors because they were so good at what they were doing, both in running and creating the programmes for camp. These guys had so many skills – music, playing piano and guitar – they could do anything. Being able to speak in



front of people, being able to facilitate a group – all this I learnt from these guys. After the days' activities were done, Andy would sit down and say, 'Let's go through the day and see how we could have improved.' And he would pass on little tips. For example, when you're in front of a crowd, or leading a big group, you mustn't have 'dead time'. In other words, there must not be any time when you are not engaging with the crowd or audience. So, have a joke or a story up your sleeve, so that, for example, if the musicians need to tune their instruments, you can engage with the crowd. Little skills like that I find invaluable in my teaching today. When I lead an assembly or I'm an MC at a function, I use all those things. And I like the continuity of being able to pass on to others what people have passed on to me.

The love of my life

It was through Scripture Union that I met my wife. The year after she left school we got together on camp as co-leaders. We were very lucky because if I had met Karen when she was a still student and I was a leader, our relationship just wouldn't have happened. She had been on a camp before as a student at school, and I often say to her that we would never have gotten together if I was a leader on that camp, because Darryl and the others would teach us, 'As a leader, you are a leader' – there was no way we could have a relationship with someone in our group. We didn't cross that line.

Things between Karen and I didn't happen for a long time, as I had another girlfriend back then. In 1990/91 we took a road trip with friends to Botswana. It was before the 1994 democratic election, and things between us kind of had to happen outside of the country, because she is white and I am 'coloured'. And so, in Botswana, we got together. Scripture Union was multidenominational and multiracial, as well. There were black, white and 'coloured' leaders working together, so

it wasn't a big thing. When we came back, I obviously had to be introduced to her parents. I had been there before as her friend because we were in Scripture Union together, but now I was a boyfriend. She asked her sister 'Do you think that I should tell Mom that Roy and I went out?' and her sister said, 'It's fine, tell Mom, but I don't think you should approach the topic with Dad.' And it went on like this with a whole series of people, because everybody that she spoke to was fine with it but then expressed a reservation about telling someone else. Her mom said, 'I don't think you should tell your grandmother,' and then when we told her grandmother, she said, 'Oh no, my dear there is no problem, it's the new South Africa, but just don't tell your grandfather.' Eventually everyone knew, and everyone was fine with it!

My parents just loved Karen from the very beginning; she is an amazing person. In 1995 we got married. I had a sabbatical that year, because after teaching for seven years you got a sabbatical for three months. And Karen had taken a gap year after her honours, as she got glandular fever. We went backpacking for a month through Zimbabwe and Malawi; it was our honeymoon. When you're travelling like that, you can't get away from each other, and you're sleeping in a tent, so you have to work any problems out because if you walk out of the tent there are elephants and all kinds of wild animals awaiting you!

We decided that we were not going to have children straight away and we did a lot of stuff between the time we got married and the time our first son, Mikha, was born. Karen and I together directed the physical programme for Scripture Union on three national camps. I was approached to join Scripture Union fulltime in Port Elizabeth, but by that stage I was committed to teaching and couldn't think of moving away from Cape Town.



Becoming a dad

In 1999, Mikha was born. And then three years later, our second son, Judha, was born. Karen had such bad pregnancies in terms of nausea, I had decided to go for a vasectomy. She was basically vomiting for nine months; for eighteen months if you consider both pregnancies. She ended up in hospital several times, having to be fed with a drip. So, after Judha we decided no more children.

'It's not about the subject – you can just read up on the lesson the night before – it's about the way you interact with the students.'

Both my sons are at the school where I am now teaching. I hope that I am also a mentor to them. I do wonder; sometimes I feel they don't look up to me like I want them to. But you never can tell because they both don't say much. They are both introverts; all of us are introverts in the family. Physically, Mikha is exceptionally disciplined. I've lost it a bit over the years, in terms of my eating and

exercise. In fact, I cancelled my gym membership so Mikha could go to gym. It's hit me quite hard that I'm not their role model anymore, in terms of my health.

It's about the relationships

After we married, Karen got a job at Cape Town High. I went to visit her when she went on their student leadership camp in Hout Bay. The deputy principal was leading the camp and Karen was the registered counsellor. He watched me one day interacting with the children, and he told Karen that

he wanted me at the school. So, I went to an interview, but when I got there the interviewers said, 'This is actually not an interview, we already know we want you here. We just want to chat about how we can fit you into the school.' They needed a geography teacher, and I had never taught that at high school level before. The principal said, 'It's not about the subject – you can just read up on the lesson the night before – it's about the way you interact with the students.'

I received quite a lot of mentoring from the deputy principal at Cape Town High School. He was an A-type personality; organised, very prepared for everything. Through my work with him I developed a lot of organisational skills. Not a lot of staff liked him because he was so driven, and quite hard. But both Karen and I worked well with him because we had a similar work ethic. He taught us a heck of a lot. He eventually got me into running the sport programme, and I later took over all sports administration at the school, which I did for many years. Sport was quite a big thing at Cape Town High, with the awarding of sports colours at a special assembly at the end of the year. We invited guest speakers – people like Springbok rugby players or the captain of the South African netball team. I also remember Natalie Du Toit speaking at our awards ceremony.

I taught at Mitchells Plain Primary for nine years, at Cape Town High for fourteen, and seven years ago I started teaching at Michael Oak High School. At that time, I was actually going to leave teaching as I had decided to acquire other skills. So, while teaching, I had enrolled in an IT course at CPU. During that time one of the school's trustees, a parent in Mikha's class said, 'I hear that you want to leave teaching, but I do think you would be an asset to Michael Oak. Why don't you apply because the High School is advertising some posts?' I applied and got the job. For the first couple of years,



I taught geography, then I started teaching maths as well. I then progressed to teaching computers and technology (CAT) to the matric students.

At Michael Oak there were experienced teachers who mentored me in the Waldorf way, which was new to me. I learnt my main purpose – to teach the children, not to teach the subject – for they don't remember the content of the subjects for long; it's the relationship and role modelling that they remember.

And then I met Nic Fine, who was another mentor to me. Having first been a parent at the school, I attended the 'coming of age' camp designed for 15-year-old boys and girls. Alongside Nic, I met incredible people, fellow parents who were volunteering on this programme. They became mentors to me. I looked up to them and observed what they were doing and how they were building relationships and skills. They taught me more about working with young people. It comes back to the whole FAT thing that I was talking about; no matter how old you are, you are still able to be taught, you can still learn. I always tell my boys, 'Listen to advice from anybody. You can then discard what you don't need, and take on board what you do need, but first listen to it.' That's something I live by as well.

My spiritual journey

I have now moved from formal religion to a more spiritual way of being. Karen and I don't subscribe to any one religion. Karen was my mentor in my shift to spirituality. Something unpleasant happened with the elders in our Methodist church, and we decided to leave. We didn't join up with another church after that. Karen was already questioning her faith. Karen is way ahead of me in terms of her intellectual ability; she has an incredibly critical mind. She always looked

critically at religion. I mean, when she read a bible passage aloud in church, she would replace 'he' with 'she'. Some people would say, 'No, you can't do that,' and the women would say, 'Wow, I've never received it like that before; for the first time I can relate.' I think my shift away from formal religion evolved very much with Karen. She read a lot of different books, and we constantly talked about things. What swung it for her was the series of books, *Conversations with God* by Neale Donald Walsh. We read all those books and they just blew our minds. Now, the being that we call God is not a religious deity for us, but something more universal. For us it has been a spiritual journey. It's not about being in a religion or the culture of a religion, but being good, doing good, loving people, and building relationships. I suppose that's the essence of any religion. So, we do it in more of a universal way.

That's where we went with our beliefs, and now, with our children, we have left it very open. They can decide for themselves. Mikha regards himself as an atheist and scoffs at religious people; not scoffs exactly, but he is quite sacrilegious, in a way. He can't understand religion because he has a much more rational way of thinking. And Judha is still maturing in his thinking.

'Listen to advice from anybody. You can then discard what you don't need, and take on board what you do need, but first listen to it.'



Developing and mentoring leaders

At Mitchells Plain Primary, we often played games. I would put one of the students into a leadership position and say,

I would put one of the students into a leadership position and say, 'You can come and organise the games for today; you are the person to run it.'

'You can come and organise the games for today; you are the person to run it.' And so, I passed on the skills that I had been taught at Scripture Union to these children, and they thrived on being given responsibility. I suppose part of my teaching skill is being able to spot those with leadership potential. And then I would take them on and mentor them. We would meet separately during the week and then they would run the games on Friday. I did the same with bible study, making space for student leaders to run sessions.

At Cape Town High I was dealing with older children. I ran an outdoor club there; we did hikes and canoe trips – there was a core group that used to go on everything. We went down the Orange River several times; we did the Tsitsikamma and Otter trails. We'd go on hikes – every second week of the term, we'd be up on the mountain. I think at that stage teenagers are breaking away from their families and they don't want to be seen to be out with mom or dad, so the teacher was a good compromise. Karen and I always saw it as a positive thing to be on the mountain, rather than meeting indoors.

Reaching the summit

Karen has dedicated her life to helping children – so that they don't get beaten and abused – by teaching parents how to discipline their children positively. During our time working together at Cape Town High, she as guidance counsellor and me as sports administrator, Karen ran an activity called the Summit Programme for children that had failed that year, especially the Grade 8s. She would take them through the week-long programme while the new Grade 8s attended orientation. She would do some life skills with them and then we would cap off the week by hiking on the mountain, often going up Lion's Head. We would do a little routine at the top with them, saying, 'Look down, you can see the school. Is that where you want to matriculate? Let's look at your aims and goals.' That kind of helped focus them.

There were children who had never been on the mountain before. I remember one child didn't come on the mountain trip and on Monday Karen asked, 'Tell me why you didn't want to be there?' He replied, 'I was scared I was going to fall off the mountain.' He saw the mountain as a sharp peak and thought that he could fall off either side; he didn't realise he could walk on it.

The price of nappies

One young man from the Summit Programme, who didn't know his dad, came to Karen for counselling. Geoffrey¹¹ only had a mom, and he had quite a temper on him that he was dealing with in counselling with Karen. He told her he was into fitness and had worked out his own routine. At home he put ice blocks down on a towel and then he did his press ups. When he was tired and fell onto the floor, the

¹¹ Not his real name



ice was so cold that he had to get back up. So, this helped him. He also told Karen that when he went running, he tied a piece of bark and dragged it so the dogs chased him, which made him run faster. She said, 'You need a proper fitness programme. I'm going to send you down the corridor to Mr Davids and you can speak to him about sports and exercise.'

So Geoff came to me to discuss exercise and training, and I invited him to the outdoor club. Geoff became my mentee. At that stage I was playing top-level volleyball and cricket. I was much thinner and fitter than I am now. He often tailed me at school, at the outdoor club, and even to our house. I would go to the shop and Geoff would come with me. At that stage, I was buying nappies for Mikha. I would say, 'You see the price of those nappies? Think twice before you get a girlfriend, my boy'. And he said that stuck with him for a long time in his life.

Geoff came on all the hikes and camping trips. I remember one year we ran a little survivor camp with the outdoor club. Geoff and I had this challenge on the side, regarding who had the best abs. Obviously, he won the challenge, and I had a T-shirt made for him with a picture of abs on it and the words 'Kiss my abs' and gave it to him as a prize. I remember going to fetch him at his mom's place and taking him to athletics, because they didn't have transport. I remember when Geoff was just short of making the Western Province team, running the 5000m.

Years later, Geoff told Karen that he was working at a restaurant in town, and he wanted us to go there. It was wonderful to see him again. When he was doing bodybuilding, he told us he had tattooed flames on his abs, but by the time we saw him again there were no abs left anymore; the flames were hidden underneath his tummy. Geoff still contacts with me from time to time. He has two

daughters now. It's been a good journey. I think we became his surrogate parents when we met him at school when he was about 14, and now he is just over 30.

Sustaining long-term relationships

Another young man, Bulelani, went to Karen for counselling because his dad had died. And then later, while he was at school, a wall collapsed on his mom and she passed away. Karen helped him negotiate all this stuff. He lived in Khayelitsha with a brother and a sister who were older than him. They were so devastated by their mom's death that he had to take up the challenge for them when part of the family wanted to take their house away. He had to fight the family, but he had the right type of temperament. And so, Karen helped him fight to keep the house so that the children could stay there on their own.

I met Bulelani on the soccer field; he was the goalkeeper. As the sports administrator, I organised the school's participation in a loveLife tournament at UWC (University of the Western Cape). It was raining and I used my dad's kombi to transport the children there. We had a soccer coach for them, and every time he asked who was available for the following match, Bulelani gave him a list. I realised that Bulelani had good admin skills, so I said to him, 'I'm going to be doing the sports awards soon and I would like you to come and help me with the organisation of the ceremony.' I got him involved and he then came to the sports office and sorted out ties and badges and everything. Being organised in this way was his thing. After Mikha's birth, Karen left the school, but Bulelani and I kept in contact, so it became a similar relationship to the one I had with Geoff.

When I resigned as the sports administrator, the principal asked Bulelani to take over. Although he was still only in



Grade 11, he did so because he knew the ropes from what he had been doing with me. Then when he matriculated, he did sports administration at CPU and he continued working at the school and coached the soccer, only resigning last year. He then got into teaching life orientation.

We fell out for a while because I loaned him some money and he didn't pay me back for a long time. The money that

I had lent him and the lack of communication about it spoiled our friendship. In the meantime, he met a girl and the two of them had a baby. After discussing the money situation with the facilitators on the 'coming of age' camp, I decided to take a stand and told him, 'I'm not going to lend you money again. If you ask me, I will say no, but the money that you owe me, I want you to put it towards your little son's education.' And so, we cleared the air and cried together and that was it.

Karen and Mikha went to see the baby. Then they came to our place, so we got to meet the baby and the mom.

Bulelani asked Karen and I, in the absence of his parents, to be godparents to his son. Tragically, the following Wednesday he phoned me to say that the baby had passed away from sudden infant death syndrome. The baby was just six-and-a-half weeks old. The parents went through a hectic time, and we were there for both of them throughout.

With today's hectic lifestyle, you can get so caught up with your own stuff that you forget to make contact, to reach out. Karen has always made sure that she makes contact and keeps up relationships.

Bulelani has been a big part of our lives; he's very much a part of the family. He knows my boys and has often been in and out of my house. We've got a group of friends who have been together since apartheid days, who we call 'our clan', and Bulelani is part of this group. He's at all our birthdays and when it is his birthday, we buy him cake and take it to his house. He made an incredible speech at my fiftieth birthday, having insisted on speaking. What he said was quite humbling. He spoke about what I meant to him and how much he has learnt from me, and that we have become friends – the gap between teacher and student had disappeared. There are so many things that Karen and I have mentioned to him along the way that he still remembers. He is a special person in both of our lives, and I don't think he will ever disappear.

With today's hectic lifestyle, you can get so caught up with your own stuff that you forget to make contact, to reach out. Karen has always made sure that she makes contact and keeps up relationships. And so, that's also something that I have learnt from Karen – maintaining a relationship.

Gary Gabriels and I, for example, still have a good conversations. If I see him now, it feels as though all the time has disappeared. We pick up from where we left off the last time. Gary was such an integral part of my volleyball days. I will always remember the way he coached us, the drills he gave us. Sometimes he made us do the weirdest exercises that people wouldn't think were part of the volleyball game. For example, he would train our peripheral vision skills. We would lie with our heads facing out of the court, on the back of the line, and he would roll balls past us. He would say, 'Look in front of you and the minute you see the ball, you get up, run and pick it up, and run and take it back.' Those exercises are common today, but back then he was way ahead of his time.

A young boy from Heideveld that I started coaching was





Roy Davids (back left) with Hearts of Men leaders

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one of the naughtiest and brightest. He was unbelievable, a remarkable volleyball player. He went on to play volleyball for South Africa, and he also played for clubs in Belgium. I would watch that guy and see Gary. When he was on court, Gary wouldn't look very athletic, but he had an ability to read a game. I remember seeing him once in a Western Province game. Before the ball was played, he was running and diving at the right spot, and he managed to pick it up. He had anticipated where this guy would hit and went there. That kind of thing just blew my mind.

I think the value of a relationship determines the level

of mentoring. The deeper the relationship, the deeper the mentoring goes. The messages become more important to you. It's that whole thing about earning the right to speak, I suppose. The longer you spend with someone, the better you know them, and the easier it is for them to speak into your life.

There is so much that we can glean from the older generation and the younger generation. I'm a teacher, teaching high school students, and I learn from them every single day.





THE SUCCESS OF ONE, IS THE SUCCESS OF ALL

Hilaire Ossang Akollo

I was born and raised in Cameroon but for the past 25 years have been living in South Africa, mostly in Cape Town. This means I have had the privilege of growing an appreciation of my own culture as well as a foreign one. There is so much I would like to say about my upbringing, the people I have encountered along the way, my embracing of new cultures and people, and how my mind and behaviour have been shaped and reshaped over time.

I am the product of experiences I lived through and people I met who helped me become who I am today: a father of two, who dreams of a better future for his children – a safer society where moral and social values are transmitted from one generation to the other, where responsibility is embraced by all, and respect is commanded as a currency in our community. My journey took place within my family and community cluster, and has been influenced by the mentoring I received there as well as elsewhere.

Children of the community

While I was growing up, I was instilled with family values and the importance of respect. According to my parents' culture, a child is seen as the responsibility of the whole community. We were well looked after by all those who were older than us, and were expected to heed and respect them, no matter what. It did not matter who fed us, and we ate anywhere food was available. In return, we were expected to serve not only our respective families, but the whole community, and

were given errands to do for the older folks. It was therefore common that on a Saturday morning we would help an elderly person in the community at the expense of the chores waiting at home.

We felt safe and carefree because we were children of the community. A custom that I witnessed at my grandparents' house illustrates this sense of safety that prevailed. Their home was built between two parallel streets and people found it tedious to travel around from one street to the other. Conveniently, the front and back doors of the house faced each other, and when both were open, one could see from one street through to the other. And so, our house became an unofficial highway – from dawn to dusk, a constant flow of people, known and unknown, passed through my grandparents' home, using the shortcut from one street to the other. It did not matter whether we were having lunch or supper. Some would greet and some not. And not once did my grandparents complain of anything missing from their house as a result of this intensive movement of people through their home. Instead, the house became a flagpole for those who were lost, to which they could refer for directions.

Times change

When I was young, we did not have electricity or running water at home, and we studied our lessons using the light from a candle or paraffin lamp. Most parents were not particularly well educated, yet they felt driven to see their children succeed and to better the conditions within our community. Our parents would listen religiously to the teacher and do whatever it took to heed the advice given. They would not miss a school meeting, some of which were held in the language of the region, as the teachers wanted to accommodate those parents who could not speak or



understand French (our second language). Whenever a child of a household achieved something, it was celebrated by the whole community, for the success of one was considered the success of all.

Things have changed nowadays. All the houses in the area I grew up in are locked; some people even have alarm systems installed. The freedom we enjoyed in my youth has been snatched away from children growing up in that area today. Parents worry when, by a certain time, their children have not returned home. Crime and housebreaking are rife, and the elderly would prefer to die, rather than trust someone they do not know. Yes, times have certainly changed!

My grandfather used to have a small radio, around which adults of our community used to gather to listen to the news. Nowadays we have 'development' and the culture of individualism has crept in. Most of the houses where I grew up have electricity; the fortunate even have a television set. Jealousy is common among members of the community, and they have become regular customers of witchdoctors whom they request to cast any spell possible upon their enemy. Harmony has disappeared as litigations among neighbours are rife. Yes, indeed, times have changed!

Mistakes our elders make

Sadly, I also witnessed negative behavioural patterns while I was growing up, which remain today. Admittedly, in the days of my youth there was no family planning, but it is revolting to see today that the elderly, including some of my generation and even in my family, do not heed and change with the times. While it is not their fault to be poor, some of my uncles over the age of 60 still make babies. Our family and community are blighted with girls falling pregnant and absent fathers.

As I said before, a child belonged to the community. While many of us benefited from the input of all, on occasion some parents tended to abuse this. We were already eight children in my family when my father, although he knew that he remained with less than a decade of employment, took a second, younger wife, with whom he fathered another four children. Immediately, the responsibility of their upbringing became ours. Adhering to the culture of community, my elder sisters, who were themselves active parents, had to sacrifice their own wellbeing to look after my father's children after he went into retirement. They had to send them to school and see to their clothing and other needs, while my parents – already old, sick and frail – needed attention and care as well.

So, the second wedding of my father brought hardship on our already constrained family, as we had no choice but to take care of my father's children from his second wife. As per our culture, it is our duty to do so when one's parents are old and no longer work. Any refraining from this duty constitutes a serious infringement of the rules of our tradition, set by our ancestors. For years, we have had to carry the mistake of our father. Our own growth was put on hold for the sake of the family, but even worse, although we tried our best to support these children, we could not give them the attention they needed for their growth. We older children of our parents had our hands full, juggling our own challenges and children. Parents who are old and frail cannot keep up with the shenanigans of strong and energetic youth. No one was there

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to give these siblings proper guidance when they reached the sensitive stage of adolescence. As a result, none of them completed high school.

Even now, we are still fixing problems caused by the irresponsible action of my father. Because of their insufficient education, the children from his second marriage cannot find decent jobs. It remains our responsibility to look after them and their children, sometimes depriving ourselves or our own families to ensure that their needs are met. We must attend to furniture, clothing, school fees, and all that is requested for their children to have a decent schooling. We cannot escape from this responsibility because it has been ingrained in our culture for generations.

Ubuntu as a blessing and a burden

This phenomenon of family responsibility is not peculiar to Cameroon, though. I was not surprised to find that even in South Africa, a fairly developed country, the black community bears the same blessing, and sometimes burden, of *ubuntu*. The notion of *ubuntu*, a Nguni term meaning 'humanity', is often translated as 'I am, because we are', or as 'humanity towards others'. In a more philosophical sense it means 'the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity'. Barack Obama, when he made a speech in Johannesburg in 2018, defined *ubuntu* as 'the recognition that we are all bound together in ways that can be invisible to the eye; that there is a oneness to humanity; that we achieve ourselves by sharing

ourselves with others and caring for those around us'.

A close friend of mine in South Africa, who is a lawyer and proud member of the Basotho clan in the Free State province, provides an example of the *ubuntu* 'burden'. He earns a comfortable living but only managed to get married at 45 years of age. Besides the hefty *lobola* (bride price) he had to pay, until recently his own wellbeing could not be his priority. Soon after he completed his degree, his father passed away, and as he was the eldest and the only child to have been given the opportunity of completing his tertiary studies, he had to take over all his late father's responsibilities: looking after his mother, brother, and sisters who themselves were mothers at home with fathers absent from their children.

My friend still lives in a rented property and has recently completed the rebuilding and extension of his late father's home, for this was at the top of the list of his priorities. He is still responsible for the wellbeing of his extended family, although he claims that this burden has significantly reduced, and that he now has room for his own personal development. Amazingly, despite his and his new family's personal growth being relegated to secondary position, he assumes his responsibilities towards his wider family without any grudges, but instead is proud of his achievements. He regards his marriage, and ultimately now being able to start taking care of himself and his new family, as the reward for a job well done – taking care of his birth family first.

I concur with him fully. Despite my father's lapse of responsibility, we continue to help one another as a family. We are all proud of my brother, for instance, who recently built two houses on the plot of our late mother. He donated one of the houses to our younger sister who cannot afford to build a house. The other house is reserved for use by any visiting family members.



Breaking the cycle – but honouring the culture

While we cannot undo the mistakes made by our elders, I would never swap nor reject my culture. I am the product of it. When I look back, I do not see a gloomy picture. The kind of lapses of responsibility I described earlier are to me simply consequences of ignorance, lack of foresight and/or refusal to embrace change. We learn from the mistakes of others and move on, carving out our future for the better. The difficulties we all dealt with as the result of my father's late marriage have made us stronger. We learnt from this and vowed not to make the same mistake. We do not want to leave a burden weighing on our children's shoulders. Instead, we do whatever possible to help them succeed: through education, mentoring and guidance, and material assistance where we can so that when they become active and independent they do not have to sacrifice their own futures for our sake. And although I love children, I only have two, for that is how many children I am confident I can look after properly. It would be foolhardy to create a battalion of children for whom I could not provide.

Indeed, I would not change my culture and upbringing. I sometimes wonder what kind of person I would be today if I had grown up differently. Without being a narcissist, I like myself and am a confident man, because I received attention and care, not only from my parents but also the larger family. They taught me the bulk of what I know today. Even as an adult, my surviving uncles and aunts spare no energy listening to me. They are the architects who made me. I mention some of the things they taught me.

Resilience and the importance of hard work – brewing for success!

My grandmother Ngha Crescence was the epitome of

resilience. She eked out a living selling *haaah, arki*, or African gin, a local brew obtained from distilled fermented palm wine, the alcohol level of which was never measured or determined. Its potency depended on how long the palm wine had fermented and on the skill of the distiller who alone knew what bark to mix with the wine. The higher alcohol content of the brew defined its higher quality. Some said, if finely mixed with cold drinks, it would rival the most expensive brands of whiskey on the market. The beverage was cheap and affordable but became prohibited for open sale because of its high alcohol content. The regulation took away my grandmother's livelihood, so she decided to take her business underground, for she had mouths to feed.

She used to travel by night to get her supply, risking her freedom, for she could not afford to let her family go hungry. Several times, she was arrested and fined but the danger that surrounded her trade did not deter her. She was driven only by her wish to provide for her family and get them out of the doldrums of poverty. She never quit, despite all the setbacks she encountered. Ultimately, my grandmother succeeded, becoming a well-off woman whom we could reliably turn to for assistance.

The importance of education – a powerful weapon

My father was a teacher, and it was customary for him to prepare for his classes every evening after supper. He would get us to sit around the table with him to study so that he

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could supervise our work and provide the necessary help and guidance. Education was, thus, given an important place in our lives. However, Ottou Joseph, my aunt's husband, was

He would get us to sit around the table with him to study, so that he could supervise our work and provide the necessary help and guidance. Education was, thus, given an important place in our lives.

the person who knowingly or unknowingly gave me a practical example of how important education is.

Two brothers who worked as labourers on a banana plantation used to live next to my grandparents. Although they earned little, they had the reputation of being big savers and led a rather peaceful life, quite satisfied with their work. It so happened that Papa Ottou (as we affectionately called him), although a learned and qualified secretary working at the offices of the same plantation and earning much more than the labourers, was facing hard times. He approached the brothers and requested a loan from them, which they agreed to grant him on condition that he signed a loan

acknowledgement. However, because the brothers could neither read nor write, they requested that he should also draft the document. Papa Ottou obliged, and in so doing, added a twist to the document that he prepared: he put his name down as lender and the brothers' names down as borrowers. When the deadline arrived, Papa Ottou refused to pay back the loan and, very agitated, the brothers reported the matter to the community leader who summoned all the parties to

the dispute for a hearing. But after reading the agreement that the parties had signed, the leader dismissed their case. Nevertheless, Papa Ottou was an honest man. He told the brothers, in front of the assembly, that he simply wanted to teach them a lesson, for it was a sin not to be able to read and write. He then paid them back the money he owed them and left. The brothers were so shaken by the lesson that the elder one enrolled in evening classes at the local primary school and was later admitted as an officer of the gendarmerie. This incident sharpened in me the need to learn and I still continue to have an interest in studying. I have realised since that day, and over time, that education is a very powerful weapon that barely ever lets us down.

Humility and perseverance – keeping on until you win

It baffles me how we tend to focus on people's successes and achievements, without examining the long and arduous paths that such people are at times forced to take. My uncle, Colonel Akollo Pierre, provides an example; after many difficulties he has reached the pinnacle of his professional career, becoming a martial court judge, and I am proud to be associated with him. I have learnt so much by observing him throughout his life journey. Akollo Pierre was not a particularly brilliant student, but was determined to reach his goal to better his circumstances, despite the many failures he suffered along the way.

As a student Akollo Pierre travelled around the country, seeking a safe shelter among family members, where he could find the peace and tranquillity he needed to study. In this way, he ended up at our home, from where the diligent student would undertake a 40-kilometre round trip daily to school on a rickety bicycle. Sometimes, his bike would get a puncture, forcing him to push the old piece of metal for long distances, as he did not have money for the repair. Despite hardship

and exhaustion, Akollo Pierre was always smiling and would never go to bed without revising his lessons. He told me that he looked forward to the end of the year when his results were released and he could enjoy the fruits of his hard labour, especially if he had passed. When he failed, he would be sad, but his attitude never changed, for he always said, 'You can't win all the time, but if you fail, you must keep on trying until you win.'

The value of true friends and loyalty

As a university graduate and young father of two, my uncle, Akollo Pierre, discovered the throes of unemployment. He made ends meet through gambling at a local casino (he was an excellent cards player) and doing menial jobs while preparing for his exams. He also made friends with a few guys who had almost no education but were fortunate enough to have a paying job or activity. These people, he said, were his angels, for they would go out of their way to assist him financially or otherwise. In the end, he was admitted into the army as an officer. He came out of military school a lieutenant after two years of gruelling training. At the school, he befriended a fellow lieutenant who regularly visited his home.

One day, this soldier friend found my uncle entertaining his 'low class' (uneducated) friends and took umbrage that my uncle could associate with such minnows. Irritated but calm, my uncle retorted that the lieutenant was welcome to leave if he found the company to be that with which he could not associate. He also told him, in no uncertain terms, that those he so scornfully despised were more valuable than those who ride on high horses and look down on others; belonging to a high social class does not make one better: one's good heart does. I never saw that gentleman at my uncle's house again.

As for my uncle, to this day he has remained our uncle,

rather than the highly ranked officer he has become. He never stands on ceremony and does not want to be treated differently. He still fights with his siblings for the last piece of meat in the pot, and performs like a clown when around children. Despite all the accolades he has garnered throughout his career, and his fine training and education, my uncle has remained the same – respectful and amenable. Colonel Akollo Pierre simply embodies humility and simplicity.

'You can't win all the time, but if you fail, you must keep on trying until you win.'

Punctuality and cleanliness – one minute late is late

My late father, Ossang Marcel Lebon, was the epitome of punctuality and cleanliness – a gentleman with good manners. Although generally a patient man, he was easily irritated by filth and lateness. I remember that one of my first gifts from him was a watch. He taught me that being on time is a sign of respect – for oneself and the person with whom one has an appointment. He also taught me that being late results in clumsy behaviour, first because one must apologise for one's lateness and second because one then spends time and effort making up for one's lateness.

After 22 years, my father left teaching, not because he no longer enjoyed what he was doing – for he used to say teaching was his calling and was in his blood – but because he needed new challenges. He went to work as a traffic regulating officer at a bus company. There as well, he quickly became popular for his emphasis on punctuality. When he would complain that a bus under his supervision was maybe a minute or two late, we would sometimes tease him by



saying that, to avert lateness in bus drivers in future, he should maybe go with them, and they could tackle the heavy traffic together.

An untidy environment would also make my father restless. His attention to detail was exceptional; in a nutshell, he was a

perfectionist. He preached by the example he set and would not waste his time talking too much. As children growing up under his roof and supervision, we were made aware of any untidiness. It then became customary for us to monitor the state of cleanliness and tidiness around the compound, especially when we knew that he was about to return from work, for, if he found anything out of place, he had the embarrassing habit of tidying it himself, without asking any questions.

To him, there was no middle ground: one applied oneself thoroughly when doing what one was asked to do. Mediocrity was not part of his life. Although he did not complete high school, he spoke French of the highest standard. When he sent me to live with my uncle for a year, I would be very wary about writing him a letter, for the first time I did so, when he replied to it, he also included in the envelope my letter with all the mistakes marked with a red pen. The message from him was loud and clear: when writing that letter, I had not taken the necessary time, nor had I made sufficient effort.

People we come across in our lives outside the family group mark and influence us indelibly, sometimes more so than our parents and family.

Influences and mentoring from outside my family

As I noted earlier, in Cameroon children do not belong to their parents only, but also to the community. So, it follows that children do not receive education from their parents only; and this becomes more so as one gets older. People we come across in our lives outside the family group mark and influence us indelibly, sometimes more so than our parents and family. We learn from our friends, elders, leaders, people we meet at our workplace, our partners, and even people that we meet only once, the interaction with them remaining etched in our minds.

The lasting influence of a smile

One person who influenced me from my childhood was Chomo Louis. Chomo and I were classmates in nursery school. He had something special about him that I cannot fully explain, but I clearly remember his contagious smile and joie de vivre that attracted me to him and caused us to become friends. Unfortunately, our friendship did not last, for his parents were transferred to another city at the end of that school year and we lost contact, but almost half a century later, I have not forgotten him, and I wonder sometimes whether, should he still be alive, I will ever meet him again. His memory – and smile – will remain with me always. I wonder whether I had any lasting influence on him, too.

Humility, discipline and self-reliance – befriending the son of a chief

My friend Delors Ngompe was a young, refined gentleman who lived with his uncle in a dilapidated house. Despite the sorry state of the house, he had set up a pleasant room where it was easy to feel the warm and welcoming atmosphere. In fact, his room became our favourite meeting place, where

we could relax and do whatever nonsense teenagers like to engage in. Alongside this happy-go-lucky attitude, Delors was a serious student. In fact, he barred from his home those friends who did not prioritise education. He regularly preached to us about education being the key to self-reliance in our future as adults.

Something I did not understand at the time was that Delors was never short of anything and wore the finest clothes and shoes available. It puzzled me that someone living in such poor surroundings could afford such niceties, and when quizzed about it he just shrugged and replied that he happened to be a lucky fellow whom family members looked after well because of his good marks at school.

Delors lived a carefree life and was never afraid to join us in whatever adventure or misadventure we chose to engage in. He was simply the guy next door and none of us imagined that he was keeping a big secret. Only when we got to university did we find out that Delors Ngompe was the son of one of the most powerful, wealthy and respected paramount traditional chiefs of Cameroon. It is commonly said that Delors was born with a silver or even a golden plate. He was supposed to live in a mansion with a handful of helpers at his service; he did not belong to our impoverished surroundings. We could not understand how he had joined in and made a warm home where we all spent time and filled our memory banks.

After the death of Delors' father, I discovered the truth about him and confronted Delors. He told me that his father chose to put him with his poor uncle because he wanted his son to grow up away from the spotlight. In the process, Delors understood that he was his own man and that the riches of his father, although they could assist him somewhere down the line, were not his. He realised

very early on that he would have to fend for himself and be independent. That is why he embraced his new life and surroundings wholeheartedly, and applied himself unreservedly to obtaining a decent education, for he knew that only his qualification would free him from depending on his family. Furthermore, because he was not interested in one day replacing his father, he did not want to live in his shadow. He consequently learnt to rely on himself. When I asked why he had not disclosed his identity before, he replied that he had not wanted to be treated differently and had only longed to live a simple and normal life, like any one of us.

In a few words, Delors had revealed himself to me. That conversation strengthened my need and resolve to be independent and never to live at the expense of others. Most importantly, Delors subtly taught me and others about life, shaping us to be better and more successful people. He may not have replaced his father, but he remains a 'chief' who rules by example, quietly but firmly.

Keeping it together – finding a mentor

Grand Gilbert, whom we affectionately called Nguingui, was a watch and clothing dealer who had a stall in the commercial district of Douala, Cameroon. I never got to know his family name but that is irrelevant. A very handsome and always well-dressed gentleman, he attracted many girls in the area but had eyes only for his wife. Ever since his younger brother, with whom I played football, introduced us, he adopted me, and I became his protégé. He was a big brother to me and others and made it his business to ensure we stayed out of trouble. I would go to him with issues that I dared not talk to my parents about, for I was sure that he would give me his full attention and advise me.

Nguingui was not well-educated – he only completed



primary school – but to me he was a complete and fulfilled man. His knowledge base was broad. He constantly read books and loved immersing himself in debates ranging from

politics to economics and, of course, sport. His father passed away when he was still young and, as the oldest of five children, he was forced to stop his schooling and go out to work to help support his mother who was raising them on her own.

Nguingui always lamented the fact that he did not get to enjoy the presence of a father in his life, and that is why he wanted us to feel acknowledged when we were around him, even if our fathers were still alive and present at home. He was passionate about seeing us succeed and, when he could afford to, he would see to some of our needs. When we asked him why he was doing so (for we could go to our

parents) he would casually tell us not to worry and that it was not necessary to bother our parents for so little. He insisted on seeing our school reports at the end of each term and had harsh words for those of us who had slacked in our efforts. Most importantly, he would, after the admonition, consult with the guilty party to see how he could help so that they could improve their score. He liked telling us how his sense of responsibility had prevented him from achieving his dream of becoming a renowned intellectual, and because of that he longed to see us achieve our dreams.

It baffled me how Nguingui was always privy to all that

was happening around our area, most importantly in matters that concerned us directly. If I was rude to the young girl who did not want to give in to my advances, Nguingui would know. If I had a disagreement with my peers, he would be able to give me all the details of the incident. Moreover, he would act on this information. If he heard about anything unbecoming that I had done, he would find time to sit me down and discuss the matter so that I did not repeat such a mistake in future. He always said that discipline, good manners, a good education, and humility were the keys to success and he would implore us not to let his dream of seeing us succeed fall away.

All the knowledge and insight I acquired from Nguingui was invaluable. At the time I did not understand his importance in my life, and so we lost contact when I came to South Africa. The undeniable reality is that his presence in my life had an immense impact on who and what I am today. Sadly, when I recently returned to Cameroon and went to enquire about him, I was informed of his passing. I am sorry that I will never have the chance to thank him for his contribution to my life – but may his soul rest in peace.

Finding a compass – opening some doors

An acquaintance in Johannesburg convinced me to travel to Cape Town by truck in order to save costs. He said that although the journey may be longer, truck drivers always need company and like travelling with hikers who pay them very little. He also undertook to accompany me to the truck port in Grasmere, where he negotiated on my behalf and I began my journey. The following morning, we stopped in Bloemfontein for an ablution and to relieve ourselves. While I was still in the toilet, the unscrupulous driver drove off without me, taking away with him all my belongings. I

I would go to him with issues that I dared not talk to my parents about, for I was sure that he would give me his full attention and advise me.



lost my bag containing my travellers' cheques, clothes, and certificates and I arrived in Cape Town a destitute man.

Against all odds, I had the good fortune upon my arrival of meeting a gentleman whose brother owned a security company in Mitchells Plain. After he heard my story, he immediately recommended me to his brother who recruited me. I started my first job as a security guard in Cape Town within 24 hours of my arrival. I kept the job for two months before moving on to do other menial but better paid jobs at another security and alarm systems company. I hence raised enough capital to start a little stall in the city bowl.

Business was good, but after a year of running the stall I started feeling uneasy. I had been in South Africa for over a year and did not have one good contact. Furthermore, although trading was feeding and clothing me, I did not want to continue living on the street. Although I had some money, I was not fulfilled. So, I engaged in a quest to find ways of getting out of the doldrums and doing something else. After all, I was young, educated and ambitious. Quietly, I started searching for jobs on several platforms, and it was during this process that I met Ntone Edjabe, a Cameroonian-born journalist working and living in Cape Town. He also had a part-time job as a basketball coach.

Ntone Edjabe became my compass. He took me under his wing when he discovered that we shared the same passion and interest for journalism. We would spend endless evenings discussing the topic, gulping down countless cups of tea or coffee, and sometimes beers and brandy. He advised me on how to go about landing a gig as a reporter and on the tenets of English-styled reporting. In Cameroon, I had previously worked as a French-speaking journalist. I was young and with no experience, and was plying my trade in a country that had just embraced a multiparty

political system and was tentatively taking its first steps into democracy. Although freedom of speech remained an ideal, I had ventured to write a piece that provoked the ire of the authorities and, for fear of prosecution, I was forced to leave my friends and family behind and skip the country.

Through Ntone Edjabe, I built a substantive address book in the media environment. He would later invite me to co-present a weekly programme on African music and culture on Bush Radio (a community radio station) – which I ended up hosting for over ten years – and introduced me to the *Cape Times*, where I was given the opportunity to publish articles. Our relationship, though, was not only professional; we ended up becoming friends and he was a never-ending spring from whose water I could drink at will. I knew I could go to him for advice, no matter what time of the day, and he would be available. But life is perpetually in motion and both our lives became a handful to control. This caused us to move apart from each other. Although we do not see each other as often as before, I know deep down that Ntone Edjabe remains a person I can rely on whenever the need arises.

Experiencing altruism and empathy

Over a decade ago, I underwent a weekend of training with the Mankind Project, at the end of which we were divided into groups to receive in-depth training over 15 weeks. Although I happen sometimes to bump into other members of my group, Bertie Phillips is the only one with whom I have developed a real brotherly relationship and kept contact. A humble, gentle and soft-spoken individual, Bertie will spare no energy to help another human being. I have many a time been the recipient of his largesse and support, be it financial, emotional or otherwise. More impressively, Bertie never registers his deeds in a record book. Once he has



accomplished what he had to do to assist, it becomes water under the bridge – for life goes on.

The other attribute that I admire in Bertie is that he never boasts. He would rather talk about current affairs than focus on himself and what he has done – unless he is asked

specifically about something and cannot escape from answering. I can recall countless lunches we shared and projects we got involved in, where Bertie's focus would be on how we could help the people involved. On one occasion, I could not refrain from asking him why he was always so readily disposed to helping others and his response was full of wisdom: 'Do I readily help people? I did not realise that. It simply gives me pleasure to be of assistance to another human

'It simply gives me pleasure to be of assistance to another human being for I know that they will one day do the same for someone else.'

being for I know that they will one day do the same for someone else.' Bertie is still part of my life, and I am blessed to be surrounded by incredible people such as him.

Finding a mentor and friend

I met Nic Fine at the now defunct Direct-Action Centre for Peace and Memory (DACPM), where I had just been recruited as project manager. The DACPM was giving diversity training and mentoring to its staff, and Nic was one of the trainers. When I shook hands with him, and noted his contagious smile and positive attitude, I felt that I had just met someone who would have meaningful influence on my life and with whom I would travel part of my life journey.

Surprisingly, of the zillions of encounters and interactions I have had and still have with this man, I cannot pinpoint what exactly I have learnt from him – his teachings are subtle but effective. However, I know that he has greatly changed my thinking and, in short, my being. An all-round mentor, Nic has positively influenced both my personal and professional life. I am a more responsible father to my son, and Nic has played a great role in shaping that. I am more focused and determined in my attempts to realise my goals and dreams, and Nic has flavoured my endeavours.

Nic has an ability to listen tirelessly and give appropriate feedback. A gentle soul, he can be firm when he takes a position but still exudes a great deal of gentleness and love. I sometimes marvel to see him in action, silently wondering how he manages to remain so calm; I have never seen him angry. How does he navigate through all the ups and downs of life, and keep that constant balance? I know deep down that his attitude is infectious, for on several occasions I have found that I mimic him when confronted with challenges. I am blessed to have met him and that he still has such a positive influence on my life.

Sitop, look – doing versus being

While writing my story, I realise that I have travelled full circle – a sign of the dynamism of life – and this begs the question, 'What is life?' I would say life is a collection of experiences that can have a positive or negative influence on our way of being. But as we grow older, we get to the point where certain things no longer impress or move us, probably based on how much experience we have gathered. We have been hurt, healed, and learnt from our mistakes so that our discernment and instinct are awoken and sharpened. While still in the game of life, we become observers as well, at times smiling at the turpitude of



younger folk who, without proper mentorship, will disappear into the quagmire of confusion.

Growing up in my native land, I had the pleasure and the blessing of spending most of my time with my maternal grandfather. This gentleman disliked pets throughout his life, and on several occasions he thwarted the attempts of my grandmother to bring a dog or cat to our home. Some months after his retirement, though, he surprised everyone when he brought home a little black dog. Very quickly, this dog became his friend and companion. He would feed it himself and walked the dog with him wherever he went. Instead of choosing one of the more popular dog names, such as Djoltan or Medor that were doing the rounds in our community, he called his dog *Sitop, Look*, a pidgin expression meaning 'sit back and observe'. Curious to discover what was hidden behind this strange name, I eventually asked my grandfather why he had chosen it. Very casually he replied that one day I would understand.

After almost half a century, I understand that life is not about doing. When we are younger, we want to achieve all that we can. In today's world, this means that we barely have time for ourselves: we juggle between a never-ending sprint towards money, our multiple engagements and responsibilities, and other trivial matters that occupy our days. We are so exhausted that we sometimes can barely keep our eyes open. We are no longer human-beings but have become human-doings. When he chose the dog's name, my grandfather was showing his household what life is about. In a way, he was following one of the main tenets of Taoism: simply accepting oneself leads to inner peace. Live life and discover who you are, for your nature is both ever changing and always the same. Do not try to resolve the various contradictions of life, instead, learn to accept yourself and the world around you. *Sitop, look!*

Do not try to resolve the various contradictions of life, instead, learn to accept yourself and the world around you. Sitop, look!





THE CIRCLE OF LIFE

Mteto Mzongwana

Life in Zwelitsha Drive

Emasakeni was the oldest of the many squatter camps in Cape Town, constructed in the bushes of Philippi in the 1940s by people wanting to be near their places of work.

Our neighbours were wonderful, special people. I was very close to the families in all three homes. I was like their additional child, because each family, when they cooked evening supper, would always dish a portion for me...

They built their homes from sacks, hence the Afrikaans name Sakkiesdorp (cement sacks) and the isiXhosa name that was derived from that, Emasakeni. It is where I was born. But I grew up in a brick house constructed in the sandy plains and gravel streets of Zwelitsha Drive.

Our three-roomed home in Zwelitsha Drive was in the middle of four-house blocks of military-style barracks. It was house number NE1412, Fourth Avenue. The yard had a beautifully trimmed hedge and a red stoep that I always polished with Cobra floor polish. The kikuyu grass in our garden was bordered with dahlias, roses and lilies, and I worked there every second day

to keep it neat. Further down the street was the Assemblies of

God church, our glorious go-to alibi when caught disobeying home curfews. This neighbourhood in Section 14 had many interesting households and characters, with daily exciting and hilarious happenings.

Our neighbours were wonderful, special people. I was very close to the families in all three homes. I was like their additional child, because each family, when they cooked evening supper, would always dish a portion for me – especially my favourite *umphokoqo* (sour milk and pap) or *umngqusho* (samp). I favoured these cuisines far more than anything else. Our neighbours in the corner house belonged to the Zion Church. Every Saturday night they held *umlaliso*, a whole-night church service, beating a single *igubu* (homemade drum) and singing to the beat of ‘Ha...men...Ha...men...Amen!’ The third middle next-door house held Stokvel parties every Friday night, as ‘home boys’ (clansmen) from the hostels enjoyed dancing to the *gumba-gumba* (amplified music) and playing raffle, using roasted chicken and cool drinks as prizes. In the fourth corner house lived an *outoppie* (old person) who earned the name Draad (wire) because of his *imiliza* (anklets and traditional wire bangles) – bling-bling in today’s terminology. Draad always wore a matching outfit in blue, red and white, his favourite colours. He had painted the bonnet and tyres of his American Buick Oldsmobile car with the same colours. The pit toilet and the house were in the same three colours. Each room of his house, including the toilet, had a sound speaker that blared 24/7.

The condition of the brick houses in Zwelitsha Drive was appalling. When people came to live here, there were only sand floors, no ceilings under the asbestos roofs, unfinished brick walls, metal doors and frames. Facing the back door in each of the houses was an asbestos pit toilet, resting in a two-foot-long pipe. Every time the pit toilets got full, a council



tractor came to dig the dirt out of the holes, from all nine sections of Zwelitsha Drive. The unbearable stench stuck with the community for a month, especially in summer.

We used and drank water from one communal tap, shared among six blocks, and there were two communal ablution blocks with showers – one for men and one for women. On both sides of the ablution blocks there were five concrete sinks for washing clothes. Each section of the township had two ablution blocks, from section nine to seventeen. Each of the nine sections consisted of forty blocks per section.

Nyanga East in those days was surrounded by farmland, natural surroundings, wildlife, rolling sand dunes, hedgerows, wild animals, and livestock from nearby farms that were owned by Jewish, German, and Dutch farmers. And on the corner of Eisleben and Lansdowne Roads stood the gigantic silos of the cement works, reaching for the sky. Locals and migrant workers from Lesotho, Botswana, Swaziland, and Transkei worked there.

Eisleben Road T-junction was a very busy place, with heavy industrial duty trucks delivering cement across the Cape Peninsula and beyond. A Chinese trading store was positioned on the corner, with Jewel's Truck Hire and Oubaas's pig farm next door. Opposite stood the cement works' offices and laboratories, now used as the Philippi Magistrates' Court. Across the road was a horses' drinking well. This was our lookout point for the bakery trucks from Duens, Atwell's, Lakeside, and Enterprise bakeries that delivered delightful leftover confectionery and bread for Oubaas's pigs.

All the yummy cakes and biscuits were fresh, they were just broken. As township kids we wanted to know why pigs should eat the best tasty cookies while we could not afford to buy them. We reckoned, 'Now is the time that no pig shall

enjoy a feast, while we hunger for the nicest things in life!' We knew that Oubaas was never near the pigs when the bakery trucks arrived, so we helped ourselves before the pigs were fed, and took some back home for our friends and families.

It was the hunting outings and adventures with the older boys that showed me the beauty of my surroundings. Some of my friends who were my age group were turned back, while I became the older boys' favourite and enjoyed every hunting journey. Hunting rewarded us with rabbit meat, birds, wildcats, berries, and wild figs as we crisscrossed the length of the forest in Crossroads and Swartklip.

Through these exploits I became familiar with the length of Eisleben, Klipfontein, Swartklip, Borchers Quarry Roads, and Crossroads Junction. In all our adventures we always walked past Klipfontein Methodist Church Mission Station, for many generations a ray of hope for those who resided in the bushes of Philippi selling firewood and collecting bones for a living. Behind the church was a cemetery, and behind the cemetery was the Featherworks factory. This factory was our perpetual last hope because sometimes we reached there still empty-handed, but at Featherworks meat was plentiful. Every day, trucks from the Maitland abattoirs came there to dump meat bones for our pleasure.

The Mission Station and Sakkiesdorp were neighbours to traders of different religions and nationalities – Jewish and Christian, English, German, Dutch, Indian and Chinese – who lived alongside the factories and horse stables within the horticultural district of Philippi. Along Eisleben Road were the German cemetery and the Lutheran Church. The cemetery has since been ravaged by squatters. The remains were removed and reburied inside the Deutsche Schule grounds in Lansdowne Road.

Along Lansdowne Road was the St Joseph's home for



orphans, with a spooky tower overlooking the orphanage. Alongside the main roads there were gum trees on both sides of the streets. As kids we also ventured into nearby Bhabie's Bioscope, which was tucked behind a shop and a garage. Bhabie was an Indian trader and property owner in Crossroads who lived in Harfield Village Claremont, where he also had a shop, now called Oblivion Restaurant.

Under the care of a surrogate mother

I am a survivor of a broken home. My father was a two-timer, living with another wife, and my mother divorced him. As a single mother, she was forced to work 'sleep-in' as a domestic servant in Muizenberg. Her circumstances made her send my three siblings to my grandmother in Umtata in the Transkei, but as the last born I was left behind in Cape Town. Because my biological mother was not in a position to look after her own children, at an early age I was entrusted to the care of the warm and comforting household of the matriarch Katie Moko (née Maarman),

*My mother was
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a coloured woman. Auntie Ousie, as she was known by everyone in Nyanga East, was the mother of two daughters with whom I bonded; Mary 'Titi' Williams, the eldest, and Meisie 'Mietjie' Moko, the youngest.

My mother was hardly ever in the township. She had no house to call her home, only a tiny room in the servants' quarters in Muizenberg, which she shared with other women who were also domestic servants. My mother had given up on having a house of her own, as she had to support her children on a meagre salary.

I was the oldest child in Ousie's household. The other children were three very young granddaughters of Ousie, and Godfrey, a young boy whom Ousie was looking after because his mother had to work sleep-in to feed her own children, like my mother. Things changed drastically for me as soon as my freedom to roam the streets was curtailed by Ousie, the matriarch. I no longer had a free ride to the world of adventures. I was given chores and responsibilities to clean the house and cook for everyone in the house. I was tasked to sell vegetables, eggs, peanuts and milk, and to go door-to-door as a runner for illegal horse betting, earning between ten cents and a Jan van Riebeeck rand per bet. Each of my roles was specified, with strict rules, because Ousie taught me how to be a responsible child. I learnt the way to the old market in Salt River first, and then to the new Epping Market. I was shown where to buy eggs at the Wetton Circle Poultry farm in Ottery, milk delivered by Royal Dairy, peanuts and sweets from Wembley Wholesalers in Ryland's corner. But how and where to sell them was my choice. While learning to juggle all these tasks single-handedly as a child, I had the privilege of travelling to places where not many children from my surroundings went; except on school excursions or at Christmas, when we all went to the beach in Muizenberg, Sea Point or Scarborough (christened 'Melody Hills' by township revellers).

Ousie's home language was Afrikaans and so we had to learn how to speak Afrikaans and English at an early age. My English and Afrikaans were polished because once or twice a week I had to travel to Titi's work in Sea Point and I had to speak to her Jewish bosses.

Because I had so much to do at home, I yearned for practice in the street games played by other children because I was always a loser when it came to playing marbles or making improvised pushcarts and wire cars or one-foot

scooters. My inability to make handwork and be like the other kids gave me a distasteful nickname; I was called '*stick enie huis*' a derogatory term in *Kaapse taal* (locally spoken Afrikaans) meaning 'you remain a mama's baby'. I enjoyed so much playing in the streets when the sun was setting, when every household's chimney was emitting smoke like clouds over the township, and streets were abuzz with children, and adults coming back from work. In every season the streets of Nyanga East were bursting with joy, each throng of children playing hula hoop or hopscotch and many other games. But every time I went to play in the streets with other children, Ousie's angry shouting was an awakening call for me to return to the house to finish whatever I had left unattended. Ousie was a take-no-nonsense matriarch, a very strict but warm mother and grandmother to sit and listen to, as she told her fables and the history of the depression of 1930. She was a kind person, loved by her neighbours. On Friday afternoons, Aunt Ousie's house buzzed with regular *outoppies* playing *fafi* (a betting game) and guzzling booze, while I read the latest news. So, for me, being at home was not a punishment.

School work and homework topped my list of to-dos. For this reason, I became a bookworm and read Ousie's newspapers, *Cape Times*, *Cape Argus*, and the *Sunday Times*. Ousie was a keen reader, mostly to take tips for horse racing. I also read Titi's story books and magazines, such as *You*, *Huisgenoot* and *Drum* – lying splayed on the floor, I read until late at night. So, to me, reading was a good substitute for losing the playing time in the streets. I also shared John and Annetjie's textbooks from Oakland High School in Lansdowne. These two children were Ousie's sister's grandchildren who stayed on Philippi farms behind the old police station.

Though Nyanga East was like any other *skomplaas* (ghetto) around South Africa, it had its own mysteries and urban

myths. It was known as Slagpaal (abattoir) by people who lived in other townships – such as Langa, and Nyanga West, now Gugulethu – because it was notorious for the violent gangsters who ruled the streets, such as the Spoilers and Blackstones. Tough guys walked the streets, waving their preferred weapons, such as *pangas* (large broad-bladed knives), *okapis* (three-star, slip-joint knives), tomahawks and machetes. They used this assortment of weapons to slay people, and bodies were found every weekend. So Nyanga East was named for results of the harrowing weekend street fights and drinking of liquor, a predictable hobby.

Role models in our community

While all these dreadful deeds were taking place, we kids growing up in the sixties and seventies were fortunate to have role models in the community – sportspeople of all kinds who were our neighbours, and the Nyanga Youth Club, founded by our elder brothers and sisters and based at the Zolani Community Centre. The centre had been built by Nyanga residents, in particular the mothers who saw a need for a community recreation centre and raised money through street collections to build it.

Also, the fathers of Nyanga had a huge task on their hands to clean the scourge of gangsterism. They formed groups

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of *amavolontiya* (volunteers) who patrolled the streets and recruited young people to join sports clubs instead of joining the Spoilers and Blackstones. In this way, various sports disciplines and activities were made accessible. You could pick and choose from judo, karate, chess, table tennis, tennis, darts, boy scouts and girl guides, acting in plays, singing

in a capella groups, joining choral and instrumental music groups, attending Sunday afternoon music concerts, and infrequent beauty contests. For this reason, Nyanga had numerous world-recognised sports champions in many arenas, such as boxing, karate and rugby.

As teenagers, we wanted to emulate our older brothers and sisters through constantly following and attending every game, from soccer to rugby – which shared the same sports fields behind the shops in Emms Drive. The annual Moshoeshoe traditional dance celebrations were also

held here; a colourful commemoration of the Basotho king, Moshoeshoe. Participants at this event were from the hostels and cement works compounds in Nyanga, as well as from as far away as Worcester and Paarl. As young people, we were going through a new revival, learning about our different cultures and traditions that were so colourful in outlook and practice, with a variety of rituals and beliefs. This rebirth

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happened during my adolescence when my new freedom was on the horizon.

Bra Sipho's disciple

My township, with its abundance of talent, had a very special person in its midst: Sipho Fuyani, the Zolani Community Centre sports facilitator. He used to spend time going around the township, organising boxing sparring sessions between young boys, and soccer challenges between the residential sections, and encouraging young people to join the Centre. Bra Sipho's energy was incredible as he strode the township streets and still came back to the Centre to teach us different games. He was an extraordinary man and his actions inspired me to raise my hand to be among his disciples. I tried all the contact sports but was too stiff to shadow box during sparring sessions. I found karate and judo less interesting. In gymnastics I hurt my back with a badly timed fall, and from there I became a hang-around buffoon.

Boxing became my second preference after soccer, because one of my best friends, Stshaba, was a junior champion at Big Mama and Big Tata's boxing stable in Elsies squatter camp along the Lotus River. (This was before they relocated to Nyanga East.) His only challenger was a guy from Nyanga West, called Bubla. But one day, I belittled Bubla and challenged him, while boasting out loud. I will never forget that day, because I really saw the stars in daylight; Bubla made sure that he gave me one hell of a punch between the eyes! After this punch, I decided to let my boxing career take a back foot, but I kept hidden among my boxing friends, just to get away from home. I learnt new tricks of telling lies when arriving home late, after meandering through the streets with friends, looking for girls our age. It was a time of bragging about *amacherrie* (girls), as we manoeuvred from one



township to the other, looking for our schoolmates and their friends in the squatter neighbourhoods of Nyanga East.

Held accountable

Unknown to me, for a very long time I had been on the radar of neighbours. The prominent person among this group was the late Joseph Hali, once South Africa's middleweight boxing champion, who had replaced my hero Sipho Fuyani as the Zolani Community Centre sports facilitator and boxing trainer. He was famous for trading punches with the best boxers in South Africa, like Elijah 'Tap Tap' Makhathini, Sydney Hoho, and Charlie 'Silver Assassin' Weir. Bra Joe, as we called Joseph Hali, was unlike Bra Sipho in managing children. He was very strict, so he checked my every move and reported on me at home every day when he came to buy milk. I remained unaware that Ousie was enquiring about my progress at the boxing gym.

The day to get the truth out of me was devised in advance, as the elders knew I was getting wiser by the day and wearing old people's shoes, so I had to be put back on track. I must follow and abide by the rules, like all children who listen to parents and value their judgement. The day came with no warning or hearing. Very early one Saturday morning, I was preparing for a trip to Ottery to buy eggs, and also preparing for the other usual duties around horse betting and the selling of boiled eggs, peanuts, fruit and veggies. But this Saturday was different. Ousie had woken up to make her own tea. I was washing myself in the bathtub when there was a knock at the front door. Ousie opened it to Bra Joe Hali, and I assumed he had come to buy his usual pint of milk. But that day, Bra Joe sat down at the table for a cup of tea with Ousie. Just by looking at them, I got a sense of Ousie's wrath.

While I was still wet, I was called to the dining room. Aunt

Ousie made it clear that I must just come naked, and when I tried to grab a towel, she scolded and asked me what I was hiding. *'Jy's nou 'n oulike kak broek, jy raak oud van jou skoene!'* (You still poop in your pants, you're getting too big for your boots!) Ousie pointed and shouted at me, *'Kyk!'* (Look!) He is growing hair, that's why he hides his *tielietjies* (balls) from old people. *Jou bliksem!* (You good-for-nothing!) shouted Ousie, 'You will now tell the truth. What have you been up to?' The leather belt was under the table; she took it out and again asked what was happening at the gym. Now speechless and trembling, words stuck in my mouth. Bra Joe just sat there. As the leather strap lashed my naked body, I cringed and cried to be forgiven. Ousie told me to shut up because I had brought this on myself. She ordered me to go and continue washing my aching body. From the bedroom, tearful and distressed, I overheard Bra Joe telling Ousie, 'He thought he was clever, because he watched us making fools of ourselves.' I finished washing and put something on to hide my agony. As a result of this confrontation, Ousie gave Bra Joe absolute permission to punish me if I didn't do what was expected. Thereafter, Bra Joe asked me to come with him to his home, and on the way he gave me wise words regarding my upbringing.

After I had learnt my shocking lesson from that unforgettable morning, I carefully changed my activities to rebuild Ousie's trust in me, because a new page in her good book was not as easy as a magic stroke. Now and then I returned to my old ways of playing dice when selling at Jabulani Hostel kitchen where older guys and hostel dwellers were engaged in playing dice and consuming *imboty'emnyama* (traditional beer and meat). This hostel was named Jabulani by the locals because of the Jabulani instant home brew beer that Bantu Administration Officials sold, trying to replace the traditionally made *umqombothi* (home



brew). One guy among the gamblers liked betting dice with me; he reckoned I was his talisman. After winning many games with him on Saturdays, I decided to gamble on my own. I saved a lot of money, which enabled me to buy soccer shirts for challenge games for our section. I did this because Bra Joe had warned me that if I did not learn anything from Bra Sipho I would be a loser for life, and he would not be there babysitting me.

A new world of drama and theatre

I loved playing soccer, but now a new interest inspired me – watching drama and dance rehearsals at Zolani Centre. I noticed acting was different from the sketches we did at school; I also learnt that I was not watching a sketch, but a

play titled *Vus'amazulu*. I found drama to be exciting and vibrant. This was an eye-opener because I knew most of the people in the drama group; some went to the same church as my mother.

This new fascination caught my eye like a bee sting. It overwhelmed my consciousness and I became engrossed by what the adults in the Bantu Theatre Group (BTG) were doing; there was music, acting and dance. I wanted to know more about these activities and found a helping hand, an older 'brother' who lived one block away from our home. He was always among young people, with very precise stories and strong warnings about others in his age

group who were wannabe *tsotsis*. 'To', as we called Toto Botha, showed us the good and the bad of growing up in Nyanga. He was an inspiration to me – he played rugby, did acting, and was a member of the Nyanga Youth Club.

The Nyanga Youth Club was the result of initiatives of high school students in our area. Originally there were no schools built in Nyanga. Residents, in particular the old man, Tat'u Mabua, started a primary school named Klip (Stone) after the houses built of stones near Nyanga's old terminus. Thereafter, formal primary schools were built because of Tat'u Mabua's insistence. However, since there were no high schools in Nyanga, many only reached Standard 6 (Grade 8). Fortunately, high schools in Langa and Gugulethu accepted learners from Nyanga, and from the fifties to the seventies students who went to Langa High School and Fezeka High School became the archetype and backbone of the Nyanga Youth Club. They were trendsetters in many things in fashion and in music such as black American and South African jazz big bands – the Kwela Kids, Dark Beats, Big Fives and Merry Max. They shone the light until 1975, when the last group took a clandestine trip to Swaziland (Eswatini) with Fumi Gqiba, now a retired chaplain of the ANC, to meet with the ANC in exile.

George Makhanya, the founder and leader of the Bantu Theatre Group (BTG), became my lifetime mentor both in soccer and theatre. He led by example. I am thrilled to have been associated with this elder, for the life that I am living today is very much based on his teachings and compassion. For me, the BTG became the place to be every evening. I still reminisce about seeing the late Ray 'Velaphi' Ntlokwana and Chris 'Ngwev'entsha' April, doyens of stage and film in South Africa. While my new interest in drama was taking shape, I noticed two white women who were always part of the drama rehearsals walking beside George Makhanya. They

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were Jennifer Stodel, a young woman, and Ms Dexter, an older woman. These women were part of the BTG and ran a soup kitchen during the day at Zolani Centre. I was interested in what these two women were doing, and what I found out changed my understanding of plays.

In later years, when I met Jenny Stodel in 1982 at a puppetry workshop at Stellenbosch University and saw a play *Kontiki* by the drama department there, I reminded her about the old man, George Makhanya. She was at first surprised. I reminded her of her years working with the BTG at the Zolani Centre in Nyanga, and she gave a gift for George Makhanya, which I delivered with love.

My love for theatre and soccer was intertwined until I found my only passion was theatre and writing. Then, over the years, my journey has included different forms of mentorship, especially in community theatre. Jenny introduced me to the People's Space Theatre, who referred me to a lady by the name of Bee Benjamin. This reference encompassed training and later an apprenticeship in theatre, where I learnt the skills of stage manager, cleaner, set builder, performer and writer, and just about everything that one could learn in theatre. Creativity, management, and personal growth were cultivated in many forms.

At the People's Space Theatre I met people who were very committed to nation building, who embraced me as a young person eager to learn. Everybody at Indawo ye Sizwe (The People's Space) was my mentor; my zeal to learn and be taught was nurtured by every individual connected to The People's Space. Some mentioned here and others not mentioned played a big role in making me the person I am today. The list is too long: Peter Krummeck; Henry Goodman; Sue Parker and all the Troupe Theatre Company members; David who was the manager; Arthur Benjamin; Unity Dennis

and David, her son, a young UCT drama student; and Mama Moyra Fine who gave me the opportunity to learn and to look after the theatre, and gave me a place to stay as an assistant to the caretaker.

My life was enriched by the wealth of knowledge and inspiration I received from Indawo ye Sizwe, where I met human beings who were talented both internationally and locally, and yet were humble. For me to rub shoulders with such people was a blessing. I cherished every moment. That motivated me and gave me the strength to work with people as a collective team and not to be self-centred.

Using what I had learnt

I must take my hat off to the Nyanga Youth Club for introducing me to the Nyanga Arts Centre initiative that was still in its founding years – especially the late Wood Qotywa, Joyce Taliwe, Mzwandile Phongoma, Skumbuzo Tshongoyi, and my cousin Mxolisi Mayekane – for their belief that I would make an impact and change the lives of many young people in the field of creative arts in Nyanga township.

To begin with, the Nyanga Arts Centre had no constitution; there were just loose groupings of individuals, such as musicians, actors, poets, visual artists and dancers. We had an old

For me to rub shoulders with such people was a blessing. I cherished every moment. That motivated me and gave me the strength to work with people as a collective team and not to be self-centred.



Leading a creative arts organisation was completely different from leading a soccer club. My skills were tested in a volatile environment, but the experience I received from The People's Space gave me the courage to persevere in difficult times.

farmhouse with many rooms for all the activities, but we were disjointed in our aims and vision. As the coordinator of the Centre, I was responsible for administration and a little office library. At this time, my drama training and writing had to take a back seat, because all the others involved had no arts management skills for running an organisation.

Leading a creative arts organisation was completely different from leading a soccer club. My skills were tested in a volatile environment, but the experience I received from The People's Space gave me the courage to persevere in difficult times. There were many practitioners who, because they did not get things done their way, would resort to dirty tactics

such as picking fights to unsettle my determination to build an institution. These people made the dream of building an institution become bleaker and darker during the hard times of oppression and suppression of the voices of the poor and the downtrodden.

Dedicated and active women

In 1980 I met two dedicated and active women who came to the Nyanga Arts Centre. Sis' Nomvula 'Ray' Mthetwa and Nombeko Mlambo became my saviours and lifelong mentors who instilled in me community-building skills, as well as introduced me to the University of Cape Town (UCT) Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, which provided workshops and training. The inspiration and work of these two women opened many doors for the Nyanga Arts Centre and my personal creativity. Through them, my poetry was perfected by Douglas Reid Skinner of *Upstream* magazine and Gus Ferguson of *Carapace*, and I was later commended by Dr Richard Rive and Professor Es'kia Mphahlele who applauded my style of writing. I was encouraged by this acknowledgement and wanted to do the same for young writers.

Through the UCT Centre for Extra-Mural Studies Summer Schools, I met two different but very focused and loving mothers, Edna Fitzgerald and Nancy Murray. They changed my way of thinking about books. Their organisation, Read Educational Trust, supported my work at the Nyanga Arts Centre and introduced me to Reader's Digest. This made a big change to the lives of all participants at the Centre. It was during the time South Africa was under sanctions and disinvestment campaigns by countries across the world. But companies who signed the Sullivan Code were allowed to operate in South Africa and Reader's Digest was one of those companies who supported the call to end apartheid. With their support for the Nyanga Arts Centre, they offered to pay me an allowance of R800 per month. I was not alone as a leader; there were five more coordinators alongside me. I decided to share the allowance with them, each one receiving R100 per month, and the extra R200 was for running costs.



Backdrop of conflict and violence

In 1984, an internecine faction fight took place in Crossroads, where factional squatter committees fought and killed one another, leaving families scattered and jostling for a place to hide. This was a time of countless nightmares because of the black-on-black violence we Nyanga residents had experienced in 1976.

Nancy Murray and Edna Fitzgerald were also supplying books to the makeshift school, Kwa Noxolo (Place of Peace) in Crossroads, but it was now dangerous for white women to enter the squatter camp. So, together with these two women, we introduced storytelling and reading workshops for children in Nyanga, also showing videos and films about the struggle for democracy in the townships and other parts of the country.

Nancy was born and grew up in the Eastern Cape. She spoke isiXhosa like any other person from Emakhoseni, as Ciskei and Transkei were called (the homelands of AmaXhosa in the Eastern Cape). It was very unfamiliar to hear a white person speaking isiXhosa. For the children of Nyanga, this was an eye opener; their eyes widened with surprise. They were unsure of what they were hearing, would come closer and touch Nancy, wanting to believe that she was the person talking in isiXhosa. They repeatedly asked me, 'Is *umlunkazi* (the white woman) really speaking isiXhosa?' For a township kid, this was bizarre. Sometimes my answer was ignored, as they surrounded Nancy to find out for themselves.

The Crossroads squatter camp was now mushrooming and spreading across the bushes. The land that used to be my hunting ground, with delicious berries, wild animals and small ponds to swim in, was engulfed with shacks, igloo-shaped structures and tents. With no time to settle as residents, the

people squatting in this forest became greedy, and warlords ruled over different vicinities. They were a threat to the leaders of Crossroads, and another faction fight was brewing.

The Witdoeke (white head-scarves) war erupted in 1985. There was pandemonium and grief across the townships of Cape Town, particularly Nyanga, KTC, and New Crossroads. Skirmishes with police, army, and the Witdoeke resulted in a civil war amongst the residents who defended their homes from Witdoeke attacks. People fleeing from the fight in Crossroads, with Witdoeke in hot pursuit, sought refuge in Nyanga. Nyanga became a war zone like other places such as Gaza and Palestine. It was a traumatic period for young people, wasted in violent clashes with the police and Witdoeke. Schools were disrupted and life came to a standstill. The Nyanga Arts Centre, like all other community facilities, churches, schools and community centres, became a place to house refugees. Due to the chaos caused by the faction fighting, young people became restless and resorted to crime and violence themselves.

My time to mentor

This was the right time for me to show my life skills and mentorship, implanted by my mentors and elders.

Schools were disrupted and life came to a standstill. The Nyanga Arts Centre, like all other community facilities, churches, schools and community centres, became a place to house refugees.



I spoke to Nancy and Edna about the plight of our young people left in limbo by the violence. Instead of learning how to make peace an everyday thing, they were caught up in violent behaviours. I was perplexed by all the mayhem and discussed how to make books and reading material available to the youth in the middle of all this violence.

The Learning Circle grew from a few comrades to a group of dedicated volunteers who started a community library.

I organised a group made up of young volunteers in the Youth Brigade, which had been formed after the Nyanga Arts Centre suffered many burglaries. They then embarked on a peace crusade and brought about some stability in the community, reducing crime, family abuse, and everyday violence. The Youth Brigade took the place of justice, law, and order, because the apartheid state machinery was now working hard to divide and rule, making it impossible for communities to live in harmony and peace in Nyanga and its surrounds.

The apartheid state used the strategy of employing a reckless police Warrant Officer by the name of Barnard to instigate violence and destabilise the communities of Nyanga, Beirut – as KTC was then called – Crossroads, and New Crossroads. I and my fellow artists and comrades were soberly guarding against the tide of mistrust, as our community elders were against us fighting the violent backlash by the state.

The pen is mightier than the sword

In our community, we brought a measure of stability and order as we took a stand against a government that was eager to cause confusion. With a few individuals, I organised a book circle. We met every evening after foot patrols and everyone had to have a book from the collection of African Writers Series and from David Philip Publishers to read to others. And so, the Learning Circle grew from a few comrades to a group of dedicated volunteers who started a community library.

This little garage-size community library was housed in a communal garage that gangsters and car thieves had used as a place to hide stolen cars, smoke drugs, and orchestrate misdeeds in the community. We had called the gangsters to a meeting and reasoned with them to stop what they were doing and to vacate this place so we could use it. We had given them an ultimatum: if they didn't vacate the garage, they would face the wrath of the Youth Brigade and not the apartheid state!

We spoke to the owners of the garage, and they were thrilled and allowed us to use the space. David Philip, Reader's Digest, and Read Educational Trust supplied the books and SCAT (Social Change Assistance Trust) sponsored the running of the Uthango Lotyebiselwano (shared resources) Learning Circle. This was shaped by Barry Streek, a respected journalist, and was hosted by Nyami Goniwe, wife of struggle stalwart Matthew Goniwe. Sis' Nyami Goniwe was just like an older sister or mother to me, encouraging and teaching the young how to behave and be responsible when dealing with community issues. I have learnt a lot from uSisi Nyami and will forever cherish her devotion to mankind and her love of people. Tragically, she passed away while I was writing this story. May her soul rest in peace.



From learning circle to filmmaking

The existence of Uthango Lotyebiselwano Learning Circle was a blessing. This project served its purpose by rendering a much-needed service for the community of Nyanga, which had no library as a local government service delivery facility. The role played by the Learning Circle was huge and helped teachers, university students, and pupils from Nyanga to access books that they could not get at any municipal library or elsewhere.

Out of this initiative I was head-hunted by Power Construction in Somerset West, through Angelique Kirk who was a ceramist. I met her through the South African Cultural History Museum and the Slave Lodge. Power Construction wanted me to come and help start an African craft centre (Indibano Craft Village) at Firlands on Sir Lowry's Pass. I left the community library in the capable hands of trusted companions. This was my first time to be formally employed and to earn a living. Working outside of local community initiatives gave me the opportunity to pursue my other talents in film and writing. While I was growing up, I had bought myself a projector and I had played my own movies outside our yard at night. Now I could start to explore my long-kept dream of one day making films.

Six very important people mentored me and helped me bring my dream to fruition. I met James Polley through UCT Extramural Studies and UCT Film Resource Unit and worked with him in the Cape Town Film Festival. I learnt so much from him about documentary filmmaking and met many international documentary filmmakers. Together with Trevor Steele-Taylor they all helped me to broaden my understanding. The cherry on top of the icing was to meet Professor Keyan Tomaselli. My horizon was broadened through

his talks at the Cape Town Film Festival in the eighties.

My filmmaking dream was polished and perfected by dedicated filmmakers in South Africa. Danie Nortje taught me to edit reels by cutting them with scissors, and everything else I wanted to know about making films. Ironically this training was done in his garage, which was decorated with paraphernalia from the ultra-conservative Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (African Resistance Movement) and on the walls hung photographs of long-bearded Afrikaner generals. Danie introduced me to the digital world of computers and their use in making documentary films, and together with the versatile Bjorn Rudner and Glen O' Leary of Global Images, sharpened my skills in everything to do with films, from writing and producing to being independent.

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Called back

In 2005, I was called back by young artists to revive the arts in Nyanga. This was after the demise of the Arts Centre and Uthango Learning Circle as a result of mismanagement and more service delivery violence. I was asked to help start something from scratch – a hard, long and mammoth task! It is now 2021, and I am still working with others to achieve the goal of building a sustainable community cultural centre. This has been such a struggle because of how the new democratic state has prioritised laws to serve those who have and not the poor majority. This has brought resentment,



rather than the political economic freedom we fought for.

These days, Nyanga is on the map for all the wrong reasons. It is the murder capital of the country. It is not like the place where I was born and grew up. It has changed for the worse. The place has become overpopulated with squatter settlements and new housing in every space you can find. When walking around the streets, you struggle to find young people with happy faces, or who are eager to learn. Young boys are fighting for territory. People do not laugh together anymore; they only complain of crime and gangsters. My house has been broken into many times. Complaining to the police is not worthwhile; you must just forget that you have

lost your valuables. The Arts Centre, our place of hope for the youth, has been broken into every week since the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. It is a nightmare. Currently my community is in tatters, we are like broken pieces of timber, a devastated forest whose recovery depends on the rains to nourish us.

My task has doubled and, for the better part, it is to mentor young people and pass on the valuable information I have learnt about nationhood and community building. As my late mother used to say, 'You are not a strong person when standing alone. Together we can achieve our goals to building a community.'



Mteto Mzongwana with colleagues at the Breyten Breytenbach Cultural Centre in Wellington, Western Cape



MY KARATE DOJO

Richard Kloosman

I am Richard Daniel Kloosman; 3rd dan Seiki Kan Goju Ryu; brown belt Kyukushin Kai Kan.

Rusthof Goju Ryu – welcome to my dojo

I had organised to meet with Godfrey Julies, principal of Rusthof Primary School in Rusthof, Strand, to discuss how I would start a dojo at his school. My friend Shaun Phillips had recommended me to the school as someone who could teach karate to help children who had discipline challenges. Mr Julies was a man with a lot on his plate, as school principals always seem to have, so when we met in his office he was walking up and down, busy organising something. When he finally found time for me, he was quite casual about me working with the children, but was concerned about where we would practise. I assured him that I was used to practising in a school classroom, so that would suffice. We agreed that I would use an unused classroom, and that classes would be on Tuesdays and Fridays at 17h30. The idea was that the school would send the challenging children, and others who were interested, and we would take it from there.

The evening of my first class arrived. During the day I had made some notes to guide me; I would have liked to give a class similar to the first karate class I had attended as a boy, but it did not turn out like that. When I arrived at the designated classroom with my two older sons, there was not even room for a mouse! I stopped counting after I reached 35 children. It turned out that the challenge for the evening was not how I would give a proper first lesson at the start of

my teaching career, but where to fit everybody in the room. I got the children to sit down and introduced myself. We spoke about what karate was, a little about karate philosophy, and I also assured them that I would not be teaching eastern religion, as I had been assured at my first class. We somehow got through the session. I remember my sons did not even get a chance to be part of the class because of the number of children in the classroom.

The next class for me was just as interesting as the first – this time because of how few children there were. Needless to say, my sons could practise that night. I was not concerned about the drop in numbers. I learnt early in my teaching career that children can get excited, can be over the moon to be in a karate class, and then you might not see them again.

What continues to interest me more than why some children drop out, is what makes some children come to lessons week after week, despite the repetitive nature of karate training. In those early days of teaching, I became aware that if these were my students, I needed to understand their psyche, otherwise I would not be a good teacher to them. It was of course easier to work out the differences between my own children, I saw them every day – but what about other people's children?

The distinctive character of my dojo is that most of the

In those early days of teaching, I became aware that if these were my students, I needed to understand their psyche, otherwise I would not be a good teacher to them.



students are younger than 13 years old. I never intended to teach young children exclusively, but it started out this way and has never changed. I have taught only two or three adults in my 12 years as a sensei; my oldest senior student currently is 20 years old.

As a teacher you decide what type of values, attitudes, and behaviours you will allow in a student and where you will draw the line. Your own moral principles come into play as well.

As my teaching skills developed, my outlook on life also developed. I started to think about why I do karate, and what I want to achieve. It became clear to me that my karate was never going to be about teaching people to defend themselves or to fight. My karate was about developing the youngsters standing before me – teaching them and counterbalancing their character weaknesses with developing their strengths. I tell my students that our karate is about stopping the fight as fast as possible and with minimal injury. As you grow in martial arts, you realise how dangerous the techniques are. You start to wonder

what would happen if you used the techniques in a real-life situation, and then you understand that avoiding conflict becomes the real skill.

Influencing young minds

When a new student stands before you, they speak a lot about themselves without saying anything. Over time, I was developing the skill to 'read' the person standing before me. I started to realise that every time a new student came into

the class, it was a new mind that could be influenced. At first, I was intimidated by that thought because the power of a teacher became very apparent to me. The power to influence a mind is probably one of the most dangerous powers to have. It is not that students do whatever you want them to do, but if you teach them a skill or an attitude that will cause them trouble in the future, you have effectively had a hand in causing them that trouble. At least that is what I believe about teachers and their influence on young, receptive minds.

As a teacher you decide what type of values, attitudes, and behaviours you will allow in a student and where you will draw the line. Your own moral principles come into play as well. If you are lacking in ethical behaviour, revealing poor morals, what influence do you have on receptive minds? I hope that my ethics have not let me down, but since I have always taken my faith in Jesus Christ seriously, following His example through His teachings and what the Bible has to say, I believe I will not negatively influence my students.

However, the question could be asked – what if the parents of the children or the children themselves do not like your ethics? This is easy to answer. If the parents or the children do not like my ethics, they are free to leave. You cannot please everybody. Something that really gets on my nerves is children with bad manners. I also do not have time to teach unwilling children with good manners. On more than one occasion, I have put young children out of the class. Some came back, some did not. I would like to think that those who did not come back learnt from me that they cannot do and say whatever they like in another person's house, as I refer to my dojo.

When I did Kyukushin Kai karate, there was no free will, no 'rights'. We were expected to agree with what the sensei said (we agreed using the words *hai sensei* and *osu*). Was this



unreasonable? We could not even ask that question. With Sensei Neil, training was more relaxed. At my dojo, I chose something in the middle. The stern warning that I give my students is that if they cannot control themselves they have no place in the dojo. Thus, they are challenged to exert self-control and if they get into trouble it is because they are out of control. I expect strong discipline in the dojo and a lot of children struggle with that. I have found that it is not because they cannot behave in a disciplined manner, but that they have not been challenged enough at home where they are allowed to run free without consequences. If such a child comes to my dojo and I discipline them, they often end up in tears. This creates palpable uneasiness in the dojo – parents waiting for or watching their children become uncomfortable. When a student misbehaves and I challenge that behaviour, I am always interested to see how they respond to me. I see it as a challenge to the young person's mind and will. However, I never lose my temper. That is counter to what I decided my karate would be about, which is to develop people.

As a result of my approach, those students who know how I expect the class to behave quickly take matters into their own hands before I get involved. There is a class discipline that has developed over the years – my seniors control the juniors, getting students to be quiet and telling them that we only have one hour to train, and we cannot waste it. Sometimes red belts discipline white belts, the one being only a step ahead of the other. This does not work for me; it should be seniors that keep the class under control. So I warn the seniors that if they do not keep the class in check they will be disciplined in front of the juniors. This may sound harsh, but what is clear from the history of my club is the love that I get from students, whether they are the ones who normally get disciplined, or not. Perhaps, if children

understand that there are clear boundaries, they later come to understand and accept those boundaries. Those who do not accept the boundaries leave.

Understanding the children

I generally have great success with children who are very busy and just cannot stand still in class, sometimes called children with ADHD. They seem to understand where I come from, are willing to take the 'push-ups punishment' or 'sit-in-the-corner punishment' and are just as enthusiastic to attend the next class. I once asked a student who was disrupting the class this question, 'Why do you come to my classes?' I then went on to ask him if I should take off my belt and allow him to teach the class. He thought about it for a bit and then apologised to me. This student is still with me. It is amazing that if you challenge a problem early on, how uncomplicated the solutions become.

Confronting children head-on might not be everyone's method of discipline, but in a safe environment like our dojo I have seen that children who are willing to listen, grow. Growth doesn't take place overnight, but with their participation they gradually change. To some, my methods might seem overbearing and controlling, even militaristic, but in my experience, if you create a safe space for children, where they see that you care for them, they respond well to correction and discipline. It is as if they find a sort of a freedom in being disciplined, knowing that the discipline is in their interests and those of their fellow students. You cannot do what I do if your

I never lose my temper. That is counter to what I decided my karate would be about, which is to develop people.



students do not trust you; you will chase them away.

An interesting thing happens to children in karate when they are being tested in gradings. They want the next belt and that motivates them to be disciplined in a way that is hard to achieve during normal classes. I remember the father of the same boy who used to disrupt my class coming to me and questioning whether his child was really ready for his grading. I told him not to worry, his son was ready. The boy did very well in the grading and behaved well too, and his

dad was so proud and relieved. His son became the champion in his very first karate tournament in kumite (fighting) and will go far in karate.

I also sometimes get children who have no self-confidence at all, and who were brought to the dojo by their parents. I remember one girl who was so unconfident when she started that her mother had to start with her. She was ashamed of not knowing what to do and did not want us to see how she struggled with the techniques.

The girl would not face the class – she looked the other way while her mother looked at what we were doing and then showed her. Of course, this did not work. I try to teach my shy students that it is silly to be ashamed when they don't know how to do something. I ask them, 'How can you be ashamed of not knowing something you could not have known?' This takes the pressure off. Also, in our dojo, no one is allowed to laugh at someone doing something wrong. Soon the girl realised that she was being silly and she had the confidence to stand alone, without her mother. This girl went on to become my senior in the dojo, second only to our single

black belt at the time. She also became the leading student of three in unison kata (three-person karate forms) competitions.

At one stage I had a boy who did not like to be corrected in the class. I could see him getting agitated when I said to him, 'No, that is not what I want, this is what I want,' and eventually he stopped coming to the dojo. He obviously did not realise that to learn a skill you must allow yourself to be taught, you must overcome the idea that you can figure it out all by yourself. Why reinvent the wheel when someone else has already done it and can teach us? There are exceptions, but mostly, we keep ourselves back when we ignore the experience and wisdom of others. This was a challenge for me as well. When I met Sensei Yonemoto, I had been doing karate for more than 20 years, but he complained to Sensei Neil that my *mae geri* (front snap kick) took too long to be effective. I had to take that on the chin and it took two visits from Japan for me to make the adjustment. I later understood that, whether you are experienced or not, your attitude towards being taught plays a big role in what you learn. If you do not know how to do something, you should listen and learn. If you think you do know how, you should still listen to new perspectives. Obviously, there were many things Yonemoto saw wrong in my karate. He chose to start with my basic kicking, but if I resisted his first teaching to me, why would he teach me anything else?

The magical black belt

Karate is not for everybody; I have been doing it since before I got married and I still cannot get my wife to join my club. All three of my sons became my students, though, and they all made it to brown belt. Sensei Neil has always been the senior examiner during the gradings. I never counted how many students I lost through the years. As their lives go on,

*...we keep
ourselves back
when we ignore
the experience
and wisdom of
others.*



their priorities change, and for this reason I have lost many good students with great karate potential. So it went with my own sons. Two stopped at brown belt. It is quite ironic how many students leave a dojo at the brink of achieving the 'magical' black belt. But the nice thing about karate is that you can always pick up where you left off. It is a lifetime sport, therefore those who left can always come back and perhaps still receive their black belt.

Currently, I have four black-belt students. However, one of the proudest moments I experienced as a sensei was when I put a black belt on my eldest son. In the Seiki Kan way, the grading for senior belts is not by appointment, but you are graded throughout the year, not only for your skill or talent, but because of your commitment and perseverance. This was what made me so proud of Joshua. It was not his talent only, but his commitment that brought him the reward.

The other three black-belt students have been with me for so long that I often forget their ages. To have taken students from when they are six to eight years old to black belt is a rare thing and one of which I am proud. These three hold a special place in my heart since they had the guts to stick to their preferred sport and have reaped the rewards. I have told them that in our dojo from now on, since they are black belts (sempai or senior students), they will be teachers. In other words, they will have to start thinking about what they are doing and must be able to teach the young ones with understanding. I do not give my senior students options in that regard. I just tell them, 'Today you will teach this to these children, and I will focus on something else with another set of children.' Sometimes not giving people options is the best thing we can do for them. Our right to choose may be a bigger hindrance to our development than we think.

We do not know how long students will be with us; they



Richard, Sensei Yonemoto and Joshua

can leave at a moment's notice. I was like that, leaving Sensei Pause, many years back. So, we must make 'deposits' in our students' lives while we can, because tomorrow they might go to high school or university, get married or go overseas, and then it is too late to challenge them to be better than they were yesterday. It is also essential, as a teacher and a developer, to celebrate your own and your students' achievements. I sometimes need to remind myself of that.

It always saddens me when I lose a student who has been with me for many years. My experience is that, if a student leaves after a few years, once they have grown to understand my methods, then they are probably leaving for reasons other than merely not liking the character of the dojo – just as I left Sensei Pause's dojo. I have had some young people with me now for years, earning black belts and national colours. The club is really growing. These facts encourage me in my belief that I might be doing something right.





The first Macassar karate class

A stretch too far

My Strand dojo was about four or five years old when I met a woman who lived in Macassar, the town in which I grew up. She was a cleaner at the place where I was employed at the time as a hearing aid technician. When she heard that I was teaching karate and that I was from Macassar initially, she asked whether I would be interested in starting a dojo there. She lived in one of the oldest parts of Macassar, which we called Deepfreeze. This name came from the factory in the area that made canned goods and other foodstuffs. They built houses for their workers near the factory and that

small part of Macassar became a self-sustaining community. Coincidentally, as teenagers, from time to time we went to watch 'karattie films' at the bioscope in this part of Macassar.

I discussed this opportunity with my wife, and we decided that I would explore it. The issue was that if I started the classes, I should not suddenly stop them. My colleague, the cleaner from work, volunteered to liaise between me and the community of Deepfreeze. A parent meeting was called at which many questions were asked, such as the fee for classes. I was so excited to do some work with this community that the fee was not something that would determine whether I would open a dojo or not. With the parents' consent and buy-in from the community leaders, I got the go-ahead to start the dojo. The local pastor allowed us to use the hall in which he held his services, and we were set.

Just like the first class at Rusthof Primary School, we had a packed hall of children in our inaugural training session. But this time I had the luxury of bringing my sons, who had their brown belts, along to use if I wanted to demonstrate something. They were about the same age as many of the students in the class, so they fitted in well. The new students could see that if they kept on coming, they would be just as good as my sons, their seniors. As expected, the group thinned out quite a bit. But I was impressed with those who came regularly. They had the talent to challenge the best in the Strand dojo.

The trouble came when I decided to leave the hearing aid job and joined Hearts of Men (HOM), which had its head office in the Strand. The shift in jobs became too disruptive for my sessions in Macassar. Working on a part-time and volunteer basis for HOM, I sometimes arrived home at 11 o'clock in the evening. The classes in Macassar were one

stretch too far to be sustainable. The late nights with HOM were coinciding with the Macassar dojo's classes, and about two-and-a-half years after opening the dojo there, I had to make the decision to close it. At the time, the club had about ten students, the highest being green belts. Although there was another dojo in Macassar, it was too far and dangerous for the students to walk there. I had another meeting with the parents, who understood my position – what a wonderful community of people they are. When we bump into one another we still chat.

Taking up a challenge

I sometimes think back to when Sensei Neil challenged me to start my own dojo. Taking up the challenge has cost me time, money, effort and patience. Would I not have been better off saying no? I would have had my Wednesdays and Fridays to myself – no classes to prepare for. At competitions I would not have had to run around all over the show, putting on gloves and belts and supporting my 'karate children' when things didn't go well. (Yes, sometimes your students become your children.) I would not have had to get up early on Saturdays for gradings, perhaps agonising over a self-conscious student or a student who fights too hard or forgets the kata.

The fact is, I would have been poorer if Sensei Neil hadn't put the challenge before me and I hadn't accepted it. You should never be forced to take up a challenge, but then you must also live with possibly regretting that you threw away the chance to experience something new and benefit from trying it. How many times do people walk away from a challenge that may have been their promotion in life? Comfort zones, procrastination, fear of making mistakes all

keep us from achieving. And, as a result, we may not reach those places that serve as platforms or incubators for others to grow in. If we keep ourselves from growing, leaving our special gifts and talents untapped, we keep those whom we influence from growing.

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A COACH'S LETTERS TO MY SON

Nic Fine

Lessons from the touchline

The international cricket coach, Paddy Upton, does not recommend giving advice. Instead, he suggests that you rather ask a question and let the solution come from the other person; this is the essence of coaching. All dads have good advice to give their sons. Fathers want to live their own unfulfilled dreams through their sons. They're often on the touchline, shouting advice in the middle of a game. I remember my own father standing on the touchline. He was a great supporter and watched nearly every match I played. I always appreciated his interest, especially as his father never got to see him play. I also remember his heightened emotions after a game, especially if we lost. In his enthusiasm, he often told me what I had done wrong, or where I was not quite good enough.

Many years later I found myself on the touchline watching my own sons play soccer. I had the same heightened emotions: a strong sense of pride when they did something brilliant on the pitch, or disappointment for them when they made a costly mistake. Our soccer club had a strict rule for parents which, of course, many struggled to apply: Don't shout criticism or advice to the players, only give praise. If you want to congratulate the team, do so, by calling out the team's name; don't single out an individual player. I tried hard to only give my sons praise after a game, to say something positive. After a loss, sometimes that was difficult. I clearly remember one day, on our way home after a match, I commented on

what my son's team could have done better and added my advice on team tactics. My son turned to me and said, 'Dad you are my father, not my coach.' His clear message silenced me. My job as a father was to show up and show interest and support; to observe my son and his team at play. There was already a coach in charge of the team; that role had been filled. I was his dad, and I had a different role to play. So, over the years I continued to watch my sons whenever I could and gained much joy from just being a supporter. Later in life, the lessons I learnt beside the field I could transfer to watching my older son perform as a professional musician. My role remains clear – I am there to show interest and to give support to my sons. That is my gift as a dad, and that is all that is required. And what a blessing it is.

A committed coach and mentor

When my older son was clearing out his bedroom, getting ready to move out of home, he showed me some wonderful letters he had pasted in a special book. They were from his football coach, written when my son was captaining the under-17 team. After every game, his coach would write a personal letter to each player, giving feedback on what the player had done well and where he could improve. He would hand each player his letter before the first practice the week following a match. How many coaches would go to so much trouble? What a committed and wonderful thing to do. He obviously believed in the development and growth of each young player. As almost any father would be, I was grateful and appreciative that my son was exposed to a good man in the community who had made positive contributions to his life, and had his best interests at heart. The letters are a superb example of coaching and mentoring – from an elder to a young man. My son gave me permission to share these letters.



GAME ON 12 MAY 2010

It is always ironic that it should take a loss to realise that your team has true potential. You tried valiantly to inspire your team to the unlikely recovery — three times in one game — and I am truly in awe of your fighting spirit, which I believe is rubbing off on the ones with the lowest levels of self-belief in the squad.

Now there is something which, as a captain and a fighter, you are going to have to swallow. Dylan, you cannot do it by yourself. You have to believe in our game plan and let the ball do the talking — not your feet. The ball has a momentum of its own, and he who can use the ball's momentum to his advantage becomes a great player.

You and Nick are holding on to the ball for far too long, and in doing so are slowing down potentially dangerous counterattacks. It is incumbent on you primarily to remind everyone else of our game plan, of letting the ball flow, of keeping the opponents guessing. And the best way of doing this — of reminding the team — is to do it yourself.

You have black holes filled with talent, but your talent needs to benefit each advance, and must protect and be useful in retreat. My job is to make that come out of you, and by God, I will pain it out of you. Heart-rending game, Well done.

GAME ON 24 APRIL

Excellent effort. You and I know that a month down the line, that score-line would read 12-0 with all the opportunities your team managed to create. As captain you will have to lift the team to success, and it all starts in training. You have to insist that the passing game is our main aim. The finishing will come.

Remember that you and Felix are both capable midfielders. If he goes forward, play behind him for the outlet ball or the loose ball. Play across the field so you can link all players into our play. You need speed training, and we have to make your free kicks lethal.

Your efforts on Saturday are appreciated by all, especially me, well done!





Dylan Fine receiving an award

GAME ON 1 MAY

This game was a perfect opportunity to show me that you can lead your team into the style that I demand, and you did a fine job of it. Your leadership seems to be respected and so you have to make full use of the situation.

You also appear much more comfortable with Nick next to you and therefore I saw a better and more regular switch of play from left to right. Your play was spot-on. I could not ask for more, but remember, there are stronger teams waiting on us.

I am concerned about the pace of our game. We can improve it by using our midfielders to move into more advanced areas so that our sideways passing is kept to a minimum and the game can progress faster. When the ball is held up in the midfield, no matter how slick and awesome the passing, the game is slowed down. No one player should have the ball for too long; I need the ball to move all the time. You have to watch the whole squad and look for favourable areas and attack it more swiftly.

*Your goal was awesome, congrats. Remember that when you are on the edge of the box like that, one of your midfielders **MUST** fall back. More strikes from outside the box should be part of our game. We will give that area more attention in training. Great game, and I expect better.*



GAME ON 8 MAY

This is the type of game and result that will test you as a captain and me as a coach. We raise a white flag, or we could dust ourselves off and try to fix what went wrong. Nothing went right for us on Saturday, and we have to learn from this. When pressure was put on us, our game plan went out the window.

A couple of things contributed to this:

- * I should have been there to start the day off, and I couldn't*
- * We appeared lethargic for some reason*
- * Some players were ill and tried to keep it hidden*
- * Key players were absent and new players had to fit in*
- * We played against a better team than in our previous two games*
- * Our midfielders were not clicking because they played too far apart*
- * Our back four failed to communicate*
- * Our goalkeeper continuously put us under unnecessary pressure*
- * Our strikers were starved of possession*
- * Refereeing decisions did not go our way*

This was no one's fault — just a bad day at the office, and I do believe we can turn things around. From now on you will discuss all player matters and game concerns with me in private for the purpose of healthy relations amongst the team.

You were not your usual self and I think it has to do with a tired body. Your possession was easily stolen, and your reactions were very slow on the ball. Please remember that we have no real speed in the squad and therefore our plan of quick passing and playing in support of the player on the ball must be pushed all the time.

You gave it your all under trying circumstances, and you did well. Work with me and let's get it right.

I sat in awe when re-reading these coaching notes many years after they were written. What masterful communication these letters from the coach displayed, guiding and grooming my son in leadership, mixing praise with insightful comments for self-improvement, always building players up and boosting their confidence and self-belief, and giving clear direction and ownership within the team environment. This man had a great gift for connecting with the young men.

Years later, when my son was playing at a more senior level and under much more pressure, I observed his then coach shouting at players, letting his emotions get the better of him, and being obsessed with results rather than development. And I saw the effect this had on my son's performance. It made me think back with gratitude, that his under-17 coach had crossed his path when he did.



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place in both directions,
from elder to youth and
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SOMETHING IS WORKING HERE

In this section, we look at informal meeting places and situations that allow for intergenerational interaction, as well as more formal programmes that bring generations together within a structured environment.

In locations where youth and elders meet and mix informally, mentoring often takes place in both directions, from elder to youth and from youth to elder, with benefits for both. Having community-based venues where this can occur is vital. When these are not present, many young and older people do not have an opportunity to meet and interact – leading to a further isolation and divisions between generations. Wonderful examples of settings where generational interaction often takes place, as witnessed by a friend and I on different occasions, are a library, a café, and a chess shop.

In a local community library, youngsters and students gathered to make use of the free WiFi and computers that were available for public use, and older folks gathered to read the newspapers and magazines, and sometimes to use

the computers. And it was at the computer desks where meaningful interactions took place. An older person would regularly call on a younger person to show them how a computer programme worked or how to access information on the internet. This might progress to lessons on how to operate the apps on a smartphone. The informal provision of technical expertise between generations led to meaningful contact and interaction, and when a youngster needed advice or guidance, it was easily available from one of the elders that they had been assisting. It was a win-win situation.

Another setting that encouraged free-flowing interactions between old and young was a community café. Most folks using the café were regulars – students who were accessing the internet, chatting with pals or having an early morning coffee, and elderly retired local residents, many of whom lived alone, and used the café as an opportunity to get out and enjoy some company. People shared the tables and seating areas; youngsters and older people sat together, interacting



and engaging with one another, telling family stories and histories and discussing issues of the day.

A chess shop specialising in chess books, boards, timers and pieces provided another community setting for intergenerational contact. In the centre of the shop were several tables, each with two chairs and a chessboard set up for a game and available for anyone to come and play. Regularly seen sitting at one of the tables was a grey-haired man and a young woman, totally absorbed in their contest. The shop owner related how, through the old man's coaching, the girl was becoming a formidable opponent.

In his book *Being Mortal*, Athul Gawande describes a wonderful project that took place at an old age home. Traditionally, old folk who give up independent living to move into residential living and care are separated from their community, families, grandchildren, and pets and often become isolated and depressed. Gawande describes a new superintendent at the home, who revolutionised the way it was run. First, with much resistance from staff and care-workers, she reintroduced pets into the home. And then she opened the home to local primary schools, providing

children with a free and safe place after school while their parents were at work, as well as help with homework from the elderly residents. Most importantly, the children filled the home with noise and youthful energy and gave residents joyful company and the sense that they were part of a community. This proved to be a very popular initiative and influenced policy changes in other retirement homes.

The stories in this section include two examples of formal programmes in which mentoring takes place – a theatre arts project, and a community and school-based programme. Sustainable and longer-term initiatives such as these often provide a conducive environment in which a transfer of knowledge and experience can occur between elders and youth. A story that highlights a more informal setting explores the role an elder can play within an extended family structure, by providing a container or holding structure within which family disputes can be resolved. We conclude the section with a story written in response to the questions: How did you get involved in this work? How did you get to where you are today; what was your journey?





MAGNET THEATRE: MAKING RESILIENT HUSTLERS

Jennie Reznick

The beginning of the Magnet story

From 1984 until 1986, I studied Theatre du Mouvement in Paris with one of the world's great theatre teachers, Jacques Lecoq. I always say that he gave me the gift of myself. Before that, I had been trained as an interpretive actress at the University of Cape Town's drama school, learning how to best serve the texts that others had written. Lecoq not only gave me the tools to be able to tell my own stories but made me believe that what I had inside of me, my own stories, obsessions and fears, were, in fact, the stuff of theatre. He indicated to me that I was my own means of production. This empowering notion has been the cornerstone of what Magnet Theatre has tried to pass on to all the people we have worked with over the 32 years of our existence.

Some things to know about Magnet Theatre

We are an NPO/PBO based in Cape Town. We have two main activities: we are theatre-makers, and we are educators. We have a social imperative to contribute to building a better and safer place specifically for young people, and a broader representation at all levels in our industry. We create original, new, South African professional theatre, foregrounding the language of the body as the primary source of meaning, and we run multilayered youth development programmes that bridge young people from the so-called margins of



poverty into tertiary education and employment in the theatre industry. Both activities feed into each other and are interlocked.

This is how we see change happening at Magnet

All the projects at Magnet Theatre follow a pyramid structure where everything builds on something before it. Every year, we work with 120 school-going children in Cape Town townships, through our Culture Gangs Programme; meaningfully occupying time, sharing theatre and life skills, and creating gangs of youth committed to culture. Once they have matriculated, some of these participants successfully audition for our fulltime Training and Job Creation Programme and continue their training for two and sometimes three years. We have 73 graduates from this fulltime programme and are currently busy with our sixth cohort of 21 trainees. We offer four internships per year in theatre arts administration, technical support, facilitation and theatre-making. Of our graduates, 97% are either studying, employed in the theatre industry, or creating their own income generating projects.

We understand that change happens over time, and that we need to be operational at multiple levels simultaneously

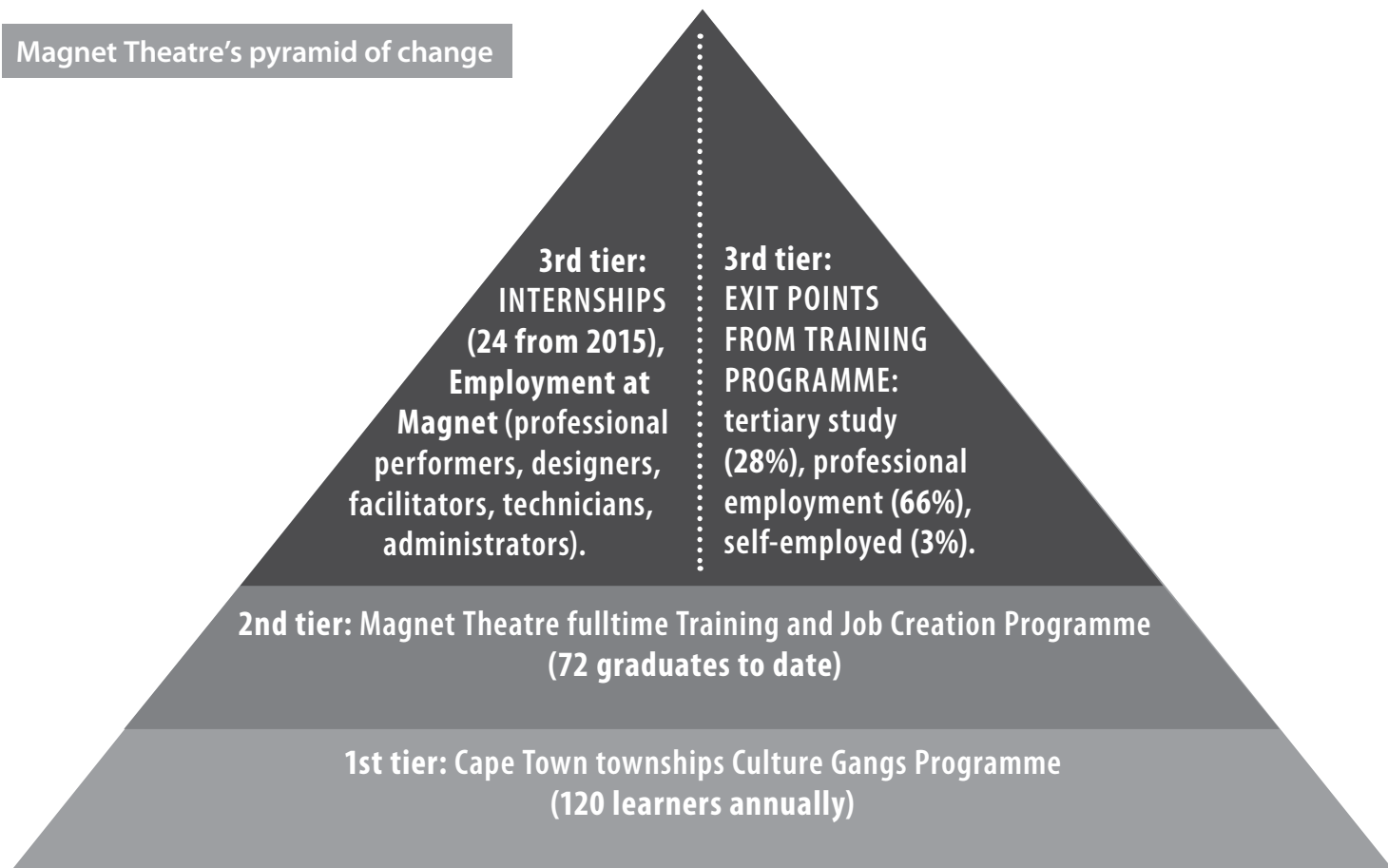


to be effective. The production profile employs young actors we have trained and the productions themselves act as a magnet to inspire and tempt our trainees and Culture Gangs participants towards excellence and towards theatre that is representative of South Africa and South African stories. Our graduates teach the new trainees and expand their skills in various internships. The senior leadership of the organisation mentor young graduates as theatre-makers towards creative and industry independence. At Magnet, mentoring happens alongside but is also embedded in the structure

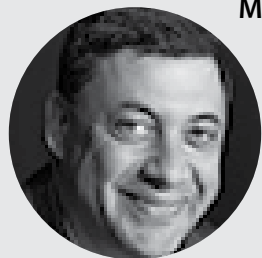
of all our activities. Yes, we teach theatre skills, but Magnet also teaches life skills and is a container, a space that our participants call home and where you will find all the layers of mentoring, care, training, and support that you might find in a good home.

As a company we seldom work from texts that have been penned outside of South Africa and, when we do, it is because those texts have something to say about our current circumstances, and we tend to adapt them to our local context.

Magnet Theatre's pyramid of change



Mentors speak about what Magnet does and how we do it



MARK FLEISHMAN
(CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: MAGNET THEATRE):

'I was mentored by two of the central figures in the development of South African theatre – not theatre that happened to be made in South Africa, but a truly South African theatre that spoke to our context, our reality, in ways that people in South Africa could relate to. My mentors were Prof. Mavis Taylor at the University of Cape Town (UCT) when I was a student, and Barney Simon, artistic director of the Market Theatre, when I was starting out on a career as a theatre-maker and educator. Their guidance embedded the imperative in me to expand the circle of participation to all people, particularly those with a history of exclusion on the grounds of race, class, gender or sexuality. On the day Mavis died she said to me: "It is up to you now", a clear handing over of a baton, reinforcing the understanding that we are ethically required to hold each other in this world. That we must do all in our power to share our knowledge with those who need it most; to be there to provide guidance and support not only in the good times but, most importantly, at the worst times, in the face of the most severe challenges. This is the ethos that has driven me over the past 30-plus years, and has been foundational in the way in which Magnet has operated since its inception. When Barney passed on, I felt so clearly that the ceiling had lowered and that there was little above me anymore. I had to step up and be to others what Mavis and Barney had been to me. Now, through Magnet, it is clear that a new generation is beginning to take on the mantle of mentorship for the organisation, but also beyond; to hold a new generation in the pursuit of knowledge and the betterment of the world which still remains before us.'



MANDLA MBOTHWE
(CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: MAGNET THEATRE):

'At Magnet we don't have a project or programme that is called mentoring. What we have are the processes of working, making theatre, telling stories, directing, that provide

all that mentoring is. The closest formal mentoring that we do is when we invite graduates to spend time and create work with Magnet Theatre, or when the trainees go on to do a third year in directing and theatre-making. Everyone has been mentored and mentors at Magnet. It is a big circle and is how we grow and spread the values and ethics of the company.'

JENNY HEWLETT
(MAGNET THEATRE ADMINISTRATOR):

'On the floor, the teaching of theatre skills has a defined container, but the real unseen mentoring – the holding, the gentling, the shushing, the sometimes pushing, challenging and holding boundaries – is much wider and is integral to all the process and all the staff within the organisation. There is no one who does not mentor in some or other capacity, even the interns who are not in their greying years; there is a huge need. I like to think that the context within an NGO is probably different to a structured corporate environment. For one thing, there can be no defined roles in a small NGO – everyone is required to be many things – marketer / teacher / receptionist / visionary / toilet cleaner / hand holder. I also like to think that the process of learning goes both ways. In a digital age, those in their twenties teach. In a creative environment, brutal honesty and bravery lessons come from those in the cauldron.

'One of my roles in the organisation – intern manager – I would see as primarily facilitating work readiness. This mentoring is daily and intensive and happens in between all the other roles and probably takes up around a third of my time, realistically. It's an easy fit; as a parent, a manager, I have been at this for many years now, encouraging growth and interrogation, searching for best practice. But a sharing also happens, as we older people in a South African context are forced to interrogate ourselves and look outwards, be prepared to sit with that which is uncomfortable. So, we teach and are taught. I think the traditional definition of mentoring – a senior or more experienced individual (the mentor) being assigned to act as an advisor, counsellor, or guide to a junior – needs a gentle buffeting and reworking. I think our Magnet Theatre family tries to let this happen.'





THEMBA STEWART (PRODUCTION MANAGER):

'Magnet Theatre is, at the core, a mentorship centre. With being a staff member at Magnet comes the role of a mentor to the students and interns. Young people are constantly being mentored to develop their skills and, in turn, pass these skills on in the development of our industry. As a mentee at Magnet Theatre, one is encouraged to learn practically and on the go under the wing of a mentor. This practical element gives rise to a more in-depth understanding of what is being taught. Equally, as the mentor, each mentee is invaluable to building and clarifying the pedagogy of their mentorship.'

ZUKISANI NONGOGO

(UCT GRADUATE AND CULTURE GANGS FACILITATOR):

'I try to be there for the [Culture Gangs] participants, not only as an arts facilitator but also as a role model and supportive peer. The Culture Gangs Programme is not merely about training young people to be theatre-makers and performers. It is also about meaningfully

occupying their time and helping to instil important values in them: the value of community, creativity, imagination, and humility. These are values central to Magnet Theatre as an organisation. What I try to do when working with Culture Gangs participants is perform these values as best I can through the way I interact with everyone and the way I guide everyone in approaching and engaging in the creative process. It's not always easy, sometimes as a facilitator one does make mistakes, losing patience with a group, being too domineering in rehearsal in such a way that blocks everyone from expressing themselves freely, and so on.

'When I recognise these mistakes, I make sure to own up to them. In this way Culture Gangs is not just about the work we do within the programme but more about what the individuals and groups can do for themselves beyond the programme's duration. When I can, I also give guidance and try to help participants see their own latent potential and inform them as best I can about the opportunities that are available to them. I mentor through validating and encouraging participants to see the value of their individual stories and those of their communities and why it is important that they are told and heard.

'What kept me going in mentoring our Culture Gangs participants was to always remember every day that I am not doing this for myself, but for them. Helping them to remember that they are important, their stories and voices are important, their community and stories in their communities are important. Building trust in our space [rehearsal space] so we can share anything between ourselves, and trusting that we will hold a safe space for ourselves and those around us. I believe I wouldn't have been able to do this without the mentorship that I got from Magnet Theatre – taking control, being able to lead, learning how to work with and around people, and also acquiring office skills. All of these have been a very huge contribution to my growth, personally, and to my work, and I am giving all this back to those around me.'

JENNIE REZNEK

(CO-ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: MAGNET THEATRE):

'From my experience over my 32 years in the company, I have understood that the mentoring process is not so much about doing but about being. That it is about creating processes where different people can come together in a space and "be" together. And that being together involves a profound listening. In Magnet's case those





Clanwilliam Arts Project

processes usually involve some kind of creative engagement, but it is often in the moments around the activities where change happens as a result of the coming together of people. It is the way that we carry ourselves in the spaces where we meet each other that provides a catalyst for change.

'The Clanwilliam Arts Project was a project that Magnet Theatre ran for 18 years in Clanwilliam. It was a multidisciplinary arts project designed to bring 40 very bright, talented creative young adults from Magnet Theatre and the University of Cape Town together with almost 700 children from a rural community in the Cederberg – a community embattled by alcoholism, high levels of school dropout rates, and teenage pregnancies.

'During the ten days of the project, there were often children who ended up under the "naughty tree", children who could not find their way into the structure of a workshop, who stole scissors and Stanley knives and sticks. Under that tree we put them together with a facilitator to listen and draw and talk and tell stories and "be" together. This was often the turning point for the most rebellious and angry child. There, quietly, they spent time with an engaged, listening adult who didn't lecture them or berate them, but was just with them for the afternoon. This "being together" with an engaged adult resulted in some of the most intense loyalty shifts towards the project, from destructive to creative, silent to talkative, angry to engaged, disconnected to involved. So, I think, in terms of the story of mentoring, what Magnet Theatre has been good at is two things. We have been good at designing really strong processes that provide opportunities for connection between people, and we have been good at attracting really special teachers and young people and leaders who are able to call up change in others because of who they are and how they are.'

What some mentees say about Magnet Theatre

'Being mentored is a bittersweet journey, bitter because it always seems that the people around me believe I can do more than I think I can, so I get pushed out of my comfort zone. The sweet part is seeing myself flourish in something I didn't think I would ever do, learning and producing great results.'

– *Palesa Mohlala (graduate of the Fulltime Training and Job Creation Programme, now an intern at Magnet)*

'I am where I am now because of the assistance of the training programme. Magnet really creates a platform and opportunities for people that want to pursue [their] dreams, and it opens doors. If such things don't exist, we are doomed.'

– *Thando Doni (Magnet graduate, award winning theatre-maker; has travelled internationally with his work)*

'This is more than just an arts training programme; it is really something that works with the root development of people.'

– *Kay Smith (Magnet graduate and regularly employed in the South African film industry and Afrikaans theatre)*

'Magnet helps us gain a lot of knowledge so that you know that whatever you take in you are going to be able to go back to your community to plan, to try to make the wrongs right. There are people who come to me who, right now, want to go to Magnet because they see what we gained and [they] want to do the same thing.'

– *Lwanda Sindaphi (first time university graduate in his family, now an honours graduate, an award-winning poet, director and playwright, and producer of his own internationally touring product, created under the mentorship of Magnet Theatre)*



Mpumie's Magnet journey

Mpumelelo Phanginxiwa was a student from Philippi and a Culture Gangs member from 2014 to 2016 through his local drama group, iThemba Labantu. In 2016 he performed in *Spirit Songs*, a collaborative production created with Magnet Theatre, iThemba Labantu, and a visiting organisation – International Theatre and Literacy Programme – as part of a three-week holiday programme. This performance was selected to participate in the ASSITEJ¹² World Congress held in Cape Town in 2017, with Mpumelelo as one of the cast members.

*We always
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Mpumelelo successfully auditioned at the beginning of 2017 for the Magnet Theatre fulltime Training and Job Creation Programme and completed his first year of training at the end of 2017. Feedback from his teachers speak to his drive and commitment, as well as an excellent work ethic, humility and respectfulness. He was encouraged to audition for a place as a drama student at the University of Cape Town and his commitment and very evident skill as a

performer won him a place for 2018; a first-time university attendee in his family.

Mpumelelo's journey perfectly illustrates Magnet's pyramid of youth development. He graduated with a Performer's Diploma in Theatre and went on to do an Advanced Diploma in Acting.

12 ASSITEJ: Association Internationale du Théâtre de l'Enfance et la Jeunesse (International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People) is an international alliance of professionals involved in theatre for children and young people.

Sipho Mazibuko's story

The story of Sipho Mazibuko (not his real name) is a powerful story of how arts interventions and Magnet Theatre have managed to change a life and, importantly, to consolidate that transformation. The line he has walked has not been a straight one with an inevitable outcome; it has been fraught at every stage with threats of poverty and the lure of the gangs. In 2019, while Sipho was completing his third year of training, his history with the gangs came back to haunt him and he had to borrow money from Magnet Theatre to get himself and his family to safety – money that he has proudly paid back from his employment as a stage manager at a local established theatre. Sipho was one of the trainees who really benefitted from the third year of internship; an extra year to confirm his learning and skill and build his confidence to impress in the industry. We always recognised in him the exceptional human being he is, as evidenced in the way in which he tells his story.

In his own words

'I was born on 5 February 1993 in Gugulethu. My mum used to tell me in the year I was born, is the year that a hero, Chris Hani, died.

'As I grew up, I was doing my primary at Sebenza Primary School. From there the only thing I used to do close to the arts was visual arts. I used to draw pictures of Nelson Mandela, Albert Luthuli at that time and I was still young, doing Grade 1. In Grade 7, one of the guys in the community was doing visual art, so he came into our primary school to teach us how to do painting, how to mix the paints to get a particular colour, how to use a brush. So, I was motivated by that, and then in Grade 8, I was starting my high school at Matthew Goniwe High School. At the time I was joining

high school, I was deep, deep, deep in gangsterism. Going to school and learning for the whole day was tiring me out, because I wanted to be in the township doing all the naughty things and the rough stuff, because I was also involved in carrying *pangas* [similar to machetes], up until I got into a point of carrying guns. I used to bunk classes – at 12 o'clock I'd bunk, and I'd go to a township so I can smoke *ganja* [marijuana] and *tik* [crystal methamphetamine] also. So, it was a nice life for us at that time, not realising that we were killing ourselves.

'At this time a guy called Jason, he's from one of the groups that is busy in our community which was funded by the late Mluleki Sam.¹³ So that guy came to us and said, "Hey, *majita* [slang for black youth], I just want us to open an organisation that is going to be dealing with music, dance and drama, and poetry." And I thought f***, so why us, in this thing you are telling us about? He said, "I want to change the life of the youth in communities and all of that. If you can allow me to have this opportunity, and then we open this organisation, you're going to see these things, you're going to see miracles; you're going to see your life changing." And I said, "My *bra* [my brother], you are eating our time. Because now we are still figuring out something for the weekend; what are we going to wear; and how are we going to buy booze." He said, "No *bafethu* [informal reference to a group of people], please man." And I said, "Okay, *majita*, I am the one. Let's take this opportunity, let's try. Because you know, here in the community all the people, they know that we are rough, we are gangsters, we are troublemakers and all of that. Let's take this opportunity. Maybe it can paint over this damage we've caused in the community."

So, I joined their rehearsals. We were doing our practice each and every day after school. So at least I found

something. Now when I was at school, I started to see things differently. My friends used to call me that time of 12 o'clock, "It's time to bunk," and I said, "No guys, you go." Because I knew that I have to finish school so that after school I can go for rehearsal; it feels nice that place, I didn't know why it did, but I didn't want to deny my heart.

'At Matthew Goniwe High School there was a drama group, but it was for Grade 12 only, but I started there and then I started to perform with them. They cast me in one of the short productions they were doing for the entire school in the hall. I was the first ever Grade 8 performer. My character – I was a violent husband and had to chase my wife across the stage. I was wearing trunks, a vest and my goggles, and I had a small stick because I'm a bit old. The whole school laughed at me and I lost hope! I'm not going to do this thing anymore; the entire school laughed at me! So, I told the teacher that I'm no longer doing this. And he said, you know what? "They laughed at you, yes, but some of them they are amazed, because it's their first time to see you doing a positive thing in your life. And you are going to grow with it; you're going to go outside and join other organisations."

'So, I started to put my whole power and my whole focus in the community group there. By the time I got to Grade 12, my school no longer had art: I wanted to go to Chris Hani High. Then my father said, "Therefore you're going to need transport for the whole year, taxi fare, up and down, up and down." And at that time my father was drinking a lot and I felt like I wasn't having a father. He said, "What is this art thing? You should go for school and then you're going to be a police[man], but this art thing; how are you going to work with that?" So, I started losing hope a bit and then I thought okay no, maybe it's fine; that life I used to live before, maybe it was a better life for my parents. So, I started to join the

¹³ Mluleki Sam was a community theatre artist employed by Magnet Theatre in the Community Groups Intervention to work with young people in the townships to develop their theatre skills. He was tragically murdered in 2017 in Khayelitsha.





gangs again, I used to keep the guns, like twenty-something guns under my mattress, in my room. At this time, I met my girlfriend and she said, "I like you, but the thing is I don't like the way your name has been spread in the community. You are a bad guy, carry guns and all of that. So, I'm going to give you two options; so, the first option, you leave the guns and you love me, or you don't love me and you love guns."

'So, I knew now I have to recover myself from the gang life, and it's not easy to escape being a gangster at all, because once you escape there and you are starting to change your life, there are things that can happen to you; maybe they can come back for you and kill you. But they let me go.

'I was still working with the drama group and we created a short production, *Have You Seen Zandile?* And then they organised a performance here at the Baxter Theatre. But the organisation started to have financial problems and started to see no way forward, there was no progress. I didn't know what to do now and I started to look for a job, and I wasn't getting a job. So, I go back again; I joined the gangs because at that time they were bribing me with R1000, sometimes R1500, so at least with that money I can buy food at home. So,

I start to keep their guns again. In 2015, one night I was drunk and I left my house and I saw these guys fighting and they were stabbing one of the guys I knew from high school. So, I said, I know this guy and I know also these boys, so I can't just let this happen in front of me, because someone is going to die and another is going to prison, so I had to disperse this. So, I put myself in, I tried to separate them and then this guy is pointing a gun at me. He shoots and I just hear bullets bouncing in the yard and I run. I feel the bullets in my body and I'm still running for my life. From there, I went to the hospital and I was dying. I was in ICU, I was in a deep coma. But then God made a plan, then I was finally fine, then that's where I started to be serious about life.

'I got a job at Caltex. While I was working at Caltex, Ongezwa, the woman I was working with in the community drama group phoned me and she said, "Sipho, you're late!" "For what, Ongezwa?" "It's time to change your life and focus on your talent. So, you're late but I have already put your details in to Magnet Theatre. It's a theatre in Observatory that is doing training for the people who want success in art and being a theatre-maker. You're going to see a lot of progress there, I promise you."

'So, when I came to Magnet Theatre, I thought, this is where I need to change my life and I am going to prove to myself that I've changed my life. On the day I was so nervous, but I pushed, I did my monologue with confidence. Then 2017 came and we started the training. I had so much more hope! For the two years I balanced my work at the garage, working night shift two nights a week, working till 4 a.m., sleeping for an hour, and waking at 5 again to get to Magnet. My attendance was not good for 2018, and when that year was ending, I started to lose hope, thinking I had failed, because I'm not prepared now to go out in the world; but

my colleagues are ready because they were always at school. Always on time, but me, I was not ready. During my one-on-one session with Jennie Reznick, she said that we have a third year for those ones who want to continue and want to prove themselves more. I said I am the one, can you please allow me that? So, in 2019 I started to focus and 2019 has pushed me onto a highly professional level. When we graduated in October, I was again starting to stress, because I don't have an agent who is going to represent me, I'm no longer going to have money to pay rent and all of that, so how am I going to survive now?

'So, I started to speak to the ex-trainees of Magnet Theatre. I met Asiphe Lili in the taxi as she was coming from work at the Baxter, and I just chatted with her. She said "Guys, you're finishing, it's going to be tough", but for me I felt that the third year at Magnet Theatre has given me the power and the strength, and also how to talk and connect with people. A week later Asiphe called me and said, "Sipho, bring your ID, your bank statement, there's a position and you need to be here now." It was 11 o'clock and she said I must be there by 1 o'clock. I didn't even wash, I went to my neighbourhood, and I borrowed transport money. The only thing that was stressing me is the thing that I learnt here at Magnet Theatre, how to manage time, be on time. If you are not on time, you are going to lose. Luckily, I made it and I met Asiphe and she said, "Put your details here, the work starts now!"

'And then we worked up until 11 p.m. because it was the day before the first preview of a show. There was pressure because I didn't have time to check scenes and cues and all of that, so I took that book and sat on the balcony at the Baxter and read, because tomorrow I had to do this. But Magnet also helped me with that, because of how fast things are done at Magnet Theatre, and these things help you in the

ultimate end, not to be lazy, not to be slow, but to be fast, be an attacker, in all things. And that was the strength that was keeping me, pushing me to read in a focused way, how to focus that [was what] we learnt in all of the exercises we have done. So that is where I realised, *ja*, now I am trained, I am well trained because all of those lessons; when I am doing something, the lessons are always coming back now.

'So, I worked there. And I remember Jennie Reznick used to say, "Take care of the reputation." So, I used to keep the reputation of Magnet Theatre, but I taught myself to take care of my reputation also. I started to say, "I'm not like other people in this industry, I am myself and I have to fight for myself and I have to find my way by myself because I am well trained. I have worked at Magnet and I have pushed myself." Production Manager Themba Stewart here at Magnet Theatre used to tell us to clean the stage when we were students. Themba used to ask, "Guys, who is going to clean the stage?" I was always running away, but then Themba was always giving us that story of Japan, that before actors in Japan are performers on stage, they are cleaning the stage for three years. "You guys, you are lucky, you just clean the stage for 30 minutes and then tomorrow you are on stage." He said, "You need to learn how to take care of the space, because one day you are going to be in the space." I didn't notice that he was talking to me

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actually, but when I was starting work at the Baxter, I started to sweep the stage. But there were already crew employed, but they were not doing that. So, I started to sweep the stage and Marisa, the manager of *Danger in the Dark* noticed that this guy is really from Magnet Theatre because he is a hard worker; no one has ever, ever swept the stage here.

'And then after two days I made sure that I changed the marks of the set, and then she also noticed that. So, what I am trying to say is, take care of yourself, respect yourself, know who you are, know your dreams, your success. So that is what I learnt, that is the culture of Magnet Theatre. Since now I have had the experience of being a stage manager, I can go and work as a stage manager on a bigger production. Marisa, the Baxter stage manager came to me and said yes, *Danger in the Dark* is ending, but we are giving you a second contract to come and work on a longer production called *Aunty Merle*. So, you will be working in the same position. I was so happy! I was always working hard so Marisa would notice me; I didn't notice that other people were watching, too. And even the workers were also watching. My Mom, now, when I phone her, she is always praying for me to succeed.

'I can say thank you to Magnet Theatre for changing my life; my parents are happy now, my family is happy, and my extended family is happy, too, and my girlfriend and my daughter, they are happy, too. And the community is happy also, because when I visit that community, my old friends, they are happy, too, and they are seeing a lot of progress, and they are saying, "Man, we are being motivated by you." I went to Grahamstown with Magnet Theatre, it was my first time flying, my first time to have an ID and passport, but when I post my achievements to Facebook so that the world can see me and how I have achieved in life, people say, "Man, you are a successful hustler." So, I am a hustler, a hustler that has been made by Magnet Theatre.'

Making hustlers

At Magnet we make hustlers, resilient hustlers. The life of the organisation lives on in all the young people whom we have mentored and who in turn become mentors of other young people. Whether the structure and building of Magnet Theatre itself continues or not, those young people are always a home for each other to be inspired and come together to inspire others.



Brian Astbury (1941–2020), founder of, director and mentor at the legendary Space Theatre in Cape Town (1972–79), quote in the documentary 'The Space – Theatre of Survival'. The Space provided a stepping stone for countless South African writers, actors and directors who were denied access to a career due to the apartheid policies of the day.

'It's all about the belief that the impossible is possible. I came to the conclusion, if something needs to be done, do it. Even if the whole world blows up, there will still be people, and people will always need to tell their stories. And remember, always keep a watchful eye on those in power, whoever they might be!'





HEARTS OF MEN

Nic Fine

For 15 years (2001–2015) Hearts of Men (HOM) ran community-based mentoring programmes for young people in four regions of the Western Cape. From 2016, HOM have been recording and publishing resources, so that all the learnings and experience gained in doing this work can be passed on to other individuals, organisations and communities.

In HOM we share four key practices when preparing and training mentors. These clarify how we see the role of the mentor and the purpose of mentoring:

- To bear witness – to observe, see what is happening, notice what the young person is doing and how they are behaving.
- To acknowledge – to communicate what you have seen, to share what you have witnessed, to confirm that you have witnessed the action.
- To encourage – to praise, to motivate, to applaud success, effort and positive achievement.

The first three practices are aimed at developing a solid and trusting relationship between mentor and mentee. Only once this has been established, does the mentor earn the right to move on to the next practice:

- To challenge – to communicate what needs to shift or change, to give guidance where necessary, to provide a specific challenge to be met.

Sitting at the core of these practices are boys and young men receiving blessings from older men. As Steve Biddulph wrote in *Raising Boys*, if a boy is not being blessed, then he is in effect being cursed.

Turning one life around at a time

Many years back, early on in my career, I was a facilitator working on a ‘youth at risk’ programme. We were debriefing after a year-long community intervention. Our success rate, the numbers of youth who had managed to turn their lives around and who were still attending the programme, was pitched at around 50%. Being inexperienced in running such interventions, and with a hefty dose of idealism, we were disappointed with this result. A senior probation officer, part of the evaluation team, intervened in our conversation. He said that we had achieved an outstanding result, especially since this was our first programme. He went on to explain that the success rate of interventions being run at the time inside youth prisons and detention centres in the UK was around 20%, with 80% recidivism rates recorded. So, we should be extremely proud of the 50%. ‘You are doing much better than the state-run programmes and you’re moving in the right direction. Keep doing what you are doing. Learn from your mistakes and keep improving. You guys are doing great!’ And so, our idealism got tempered with a pinch of realism. I started focusing on individual successes, rather than overall percentage figures. With the wise guidance of experienced elders, I started to understand that you turn one life around at a time, and that each life impacted will have a knock-on effect on a whole family, future relationships and parenting. The wider effect of this work is never captured in the initial percentages recorded.

We also learnt that even with the ‘programme failures’, the youngsters who have stopped attending or are still getting themselves into trouble, we never know what impact we might have made that will only emerge or come to fruition later in their lives. This lesson came back to me many



years later when I was working on another development programme, Moving into Manhood, designed for young men. One young man resisted our facilitation all the way through the five days. He stayed on the programme but kept pushing back, expressing open criticism and scepticism

about what we were doing. Our attitude was that we should accept that the programme doesn't work for everybody, and that's okay. If one young man hated it and thought we were all misguided, that didn't need to influence our assessment of the programme for the majority of participants.

About five years later, I happened to bump into the same young man who was now studying at university. He stopped and greeted me enthusiastically, and asked if I was still a facilitator on the programme. I said that I was. He informed me that his brother was attending that year.

My heart sank as I imagined what he was telling his sibling, from his negative perspective and experience. The young man then stunned me by saying that he would come to the closing ceremony instead of his dad, who was working abroad at the time, and deliver a blessing for his brother. He went on to say that he remembered the programme as one of the best experiences he had ever had, and that it had made a big difference in his life. We had decided that this young man had not benefitted at all from his participation – and how wrong we were.

When we train new facilitators, we use stories like this

When we train new facilitators, we use stories like this one as examples to emphasise the importance of planting a seed that we may not see grow.

one as examples to emphasise the importance of planting a seed that we may not see grow. We encourage facilitators not to lose hope when our efforts appear not to be working, because you never know!

Learning how to take care

A friend of mine who is passionate about growing bonsai trees told me this story from one of his visits to Japan. The owner and custodian of an ancient 1000-year-old tree received an offer from a family to purchase the treasure. He said he would be prepared to pass the tree on only after the father and son had learnt from him how to care for it. This process took ten long years!

Mentoring is not just about handing down skills. It is about learning how to take care of things: relationships, the land, finances, animals, nature, ourselves. In our wilderness programme, The Wild at Heart Adventure, one of the first questions we ask the young men is, 'What have you done with the garden which was entrusted to you?'¹⁴ In his novel, *The Overstory*, author Richard Powers asks, 'What is the single best thing a person can do for tomorrow's world?' His answer to his own question is, plant a tree. He describes trees beautifully as 'a passage between earth and sky'. Powers quotes philosopher Rabindranath Tagore: 'Trees are the earth's endless effort to speak to the listening heaven. The clearest way into the universe, is through a forest wilderness.'

When referring to nature, the Roman poet Ovid (43 BC–17 or 18 AD) wrote, 'All life is turning into other things.' Indeed, in the mentoring and parenting processes, we are made aware that all young life is constantly maturing, ageing on a daily basis. And as parents and mentors, we must keep changing and progressing each day, to meet this challenge.

14 Borrowed from the Spanish poet, Antonio Machado, 1875–1939



Participants in HOM programmes express their feelings

'I am a former combatant who was part of the liberation struggle. I first came into contact with Hearts of Men in 2006. They were part of facilitating a course I participated in called Warriors for Peace. When I returned from this experience, I noticed a change in me. Before I left to do this training, I was having difficulties in my social life. I was failing everyone around me, including the mother of my children. I was constantly angry. But I started to realise it wasn't just me. Many of the men in my community were treating women and children badly. That is when I started to make other men realise these negative behavioural patterns. I had been conditioned to be mean and think only of myself, as men do. I had been taught to always wear body armour as a shield to protect my heart, as opposed to expressing my feelings or being compassionate to others. Life was about me, myself, I, wherever I was. I had never had a chance to look at myself the way I did then, after the course.

I sincerely commend HOM for their wonderful programme. And having to share it with other ex-combatants as a means of social reintegration. As a former combatant, this process has helped me to deal with my burdens and to re-pattern my mind in a positive way and constructive manner. Today, I know that it is my responsibility to create a healthy, close relationship between me as a man and boys around me, as well as with women, young and old.'

Mzwabantu Noji, HOM course participant and former staff facilitator

'In 2005, I joined HOM. I was looking for an organisation where I could fit in and where I could learn something that would make a difference in my life. Like many other young men that joined, I didn't grow up with a father figure. At HOM I met real fathers; I learnt how to focus on being myself again. I gained skills, knowledge and experience from listening to the stories of others. I now know that real men have feelings, respect and help each other to see what's inside ourselves. And that it takes a real man to be a man.'

Jerome Damonse, HOM course participant and former staff member

'For years I had to go to the doctor or sangoma for medicine to cure me, but it didn't work. It cost me a fortune. But I came to the wilderness without paying and receiving medicine, and I haven't felt this good in my life. I'm flying, nothing can stop me now. They don't call me Determined Buffalo for nothing! This flower I am holding speaks about my new life I'm starting today.'

Determined Buffalo, HOM course participant

'I was about to go on a journey that was going to change my life forever. A journey that was going to take me right down into my own heart. I do hope that somehow, every man finds his heart, in a Circle of Men, the way I found mine.'

Free Dove Alliston Fortuin, HOM course participant

'What is masculinity? Does masculinity mean just one thing? Are there different aspects to masculinity, to being a man? I like to think what I do is masculine. When I hold a little baby and kiss it, that's the masculine part of me holding that little baby. When I have tears because I am scared, or because I'm full of joy, that's the masculine part of me where the tears are coming from. Little boys often just grow into bigger little boys. They are merely children in adult bodies. They spend their lives pretending to be men.'

HOM facilitator

"My advice to young people going through tough times is to be open-minded when people want to help you. If someone is reaching out to you, then don't push that person away. Allow them to work with you through the difficult times. I hope that young people reading my story can learn from my experiences. I want other youth to try and avoid the same mistakes that I have made."

HOM youth participant



Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure

In the early years of HOM, after our first programme in Bonteheuwel, Cape Town, I encouraged my colleagues to establish programmes within their own communities. This they did successfully. One day in a meeting, they turned to me and asked when I was going to set up a programme in

We identified a gap in the support provided to adolescents in their transition through puberty to becoming young adults, from boyhood to manhood, from girlhood to womanhood.

my own community. This question rattled me initially. I had been so busy supporting others in their programmes that I was not at all focused on my own community. I eventually settled on my sons' school as 'my community'. After all, I was there every day, dropping my sons off, and was also involved in supporting the running of the school in various ways. So, together with other parents and teachers, I helped establish the Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure for teenagers and their parents. This annual programme for the Class/Grade 10 students (15-to-16-year-olds) was birthed by staff and parents at a visioning day held at the school in 2000, where we were exploring how to strengthen the school and improve what was offered to the

students. We identified a gap in the support provided to adolescents in their transition through puberty to becoming young adults, from boyhood to manhood, from girlhood to womanhood, and a working group of parents and teachers began to design what such an intervention would look like.

The design team decided it was important to give young women and men their own spaces in which to explore what it means to be a woman and a man in this modern age.

And so, a programme with two streams that in many ways mirrored each other was created under the title Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure: one stream explored womanhood for young women, facilitated by women, and the other explored manhood for young men, facilitated by men. The process in each focused on the four elements in the title:

- Roots/Routes – sharing where you come from; exploring your connections to your family, community, culture; remembering the journey you have undertaken to get to where you are today
- Hearts – expressing what you are carrying in your heart; getting to the 'heart of the matter'; exploring 'open hearts' and 'closed hearts'
- Wings – looking at where you are heading; sharing your vision; exploring what it will take to accomplish
- Adventure – allowing yourself to experience the process, being surprised, without knowing exactly what is going to happen next; enjoying sharing yourself with others and allowing others to share themselves with you.

We decided that, Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure would be a five-day journey of discovery in a rural or wilderness setting. Although parents would not facilitate this process with their own children, they would be closely involved. For each stream of the programme, two ceremonies were created, a leaving ceremony and a welcoming home ceremony. For the young women, their father or another significant man would send them off on their journey and their mother or another chosen woman would welcome them at the end of the five-day process. For the young men,



their mother or another significant woman would send them off and their father or another chosen man would welcome them back at the end. Volunteer parents would facilitate preparation sessions beforehand and debriefing sessions afterwards with families of participating students and with the students themselves.

Since the inception of Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure in 2002, an average of 25 students, 50 parents or chosen adults, plus 15 community volunteers have participated annually. For a volunteer programme to sustain itself over such a long period is an admirable achievement. Mentorship and support occur powerfully, both between adults and teenagers, and within the adult facilitating teams. We have practised a system of rotating leadership, whereby each new programme leader is identified in advance and is well prepared for assuming leadership by working closely with the current leader, as well as being mentored by a past leader once they take over. Each team is made up of parents who are new to the process, parents with two to four years of experience who can support the newcomers, and experienced elders who can support the team leaders and the whole process. This mentoring structure – which includes ‘generations’ of parents, the sharing of experience, and the careful handover of leadership – has created stability in the facilitation team and quality in programme delivery over the many years. Below, I unpack some of the key characteristics that have made this possible.

Promoting the spirit of volunteering

Facilitators who are prepared to volunteer their time are crucial to making this school community initiative sustainable in the long run. Parent facilitators who are driven purely by their passion for this work, rather than by money, issues of employment or position, make for a less complicated working

environment. Programmes are weakened and may collapse when availability of funding becomes a problem, or where tensions emerge due to monetary issues. All programmes cost money; in this case, the school covers half the costs and the parents of participating students the other. Parent facilitators are reimbursed for what they spend on travelling or childcare, but do not receive payment for time given to the programme, which over a year is substantial. When we have asked parents why they continue to volunteer their time, year after year, they have identified the following benefits from participating in the process:

- They have found it rewarding to engage with young people and to see the positive effects of the programme.
- They have gained new skills and confidence in facilitation.
- They have valued being part of a supportive team environment.
- They have enjoyed feeling part of a cohesive community.
- They have been able to explore issues of manhood, womanhood, and parenting with peers.
- They have experienced a good balance between giving and receiving through the programme.

We have practised a system of rotating leadership, whereby each new programme leader is identified in advance and is well prepared for assuming leadership by working closely with the current leader.



Holding conversations across the generations

A strength of this programme is to create a space within which powerful conversations can take place between generations. We have discovered that young people are hungry to engage with older men and women around difficult issues and questions, especially those youngsters who find it difficult to talk to their own parents about these things. For example, during a 'Body Talk' evening, when adults and youth share stories around topics such as body

image, sexual exploration, sexuality, intimacy and relationships, the youth pose some fascinating questions: 'How do you manage to keep a sexual relationship alive after many years of marriage?', 'What is the difference between love and lust?', 'If I find the same gender attractive, does this necessarily mean I am gay?', 'Why did you bring a child into this world?', 'How do you keep a relationship going long-term, without it getting boring?', 'What do you do in a relationship when you find yourself attracted to others? Is

this bad?', 'Does pornography have a purpose?', 'When is sex consensual?' Elders in the circle also have an opportunity to ask questions of the youngsters about how they perceive gender, sexuality, and specific challenges they face. The depth of conversation and appreciation of this cross-generational sharing are amazing to witness.

The success of this programme can also be attributed in part to the desire of some past student participants to join the facilitation team. (Returning graduates have also

sometimes stood in for a parent at the ceremonies that start and end the five-day experience.) Having younger facilitators, who have already experienced the programme join the older men and women, helps enormously in our work with the students. The mixing of ages and different experiences brings more diverse perspectives into play. We also encourage participants from the different years to gather for an evening to share amongst themselves. This provides for a dynamic meeting of the generations to listen to one another's stories and to learn from one another's experiences, and is another way of keeping the work alive.

Experiencing a sense of community

Most youth programmes are led by a single facilitator who is usually a professional in the field. The Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure programme is led by a community of ordinary men and women with life and parenting experience and a diverse range of skills. It is quite powerful having a number of men or women acknowledging you and giving you feedback, as opposed to just one professional facilitator. The youngsters are exposed to various worldviews, and gain much from hearing diverse perspectives on what it might mean to be a woman or a man in this modern age. Having a team of adults present also has a balancing effect on how the elders might perceive a young person. Different perspectives can be useful.

The participating teenagers experience being part of a community of men and women. It is an accepting community that welcomes participants from different cultures and backgrounds, and from a variety of faiths or from no faith at all. Group learning takes place when elders give youngsters feedback and also share from their own experiences. Learning also takes place within the community

The participating teenagers experience being part of a community of men and women.



of young people themselves, by hearing one another's life experiences. And the elders learn from the young people themselves, by listening to their perspectives and their feedback.

Creating a safe space for young people

The programme is designed with very clearly structured activities, challenges, and processes that take everyone through an experiential journey from arrival to departure. The young people provide the content by sharing their life stories, experiences, concerns, and challenges within the safe holding of the structure. Confidentiality is highly emphasised. Individuals might choose to share their own experience and learnings with others after the programme, but they are asked not to repeat other people's experiences and stories. The maintaining of this trust is what has enhanced the programme's credibility over the years. Facilitators do not report back personal details to the parents or teachers of the young people. All parties respect this private space.

Much effort is put into welcoming all young people into the programme by emphasising diversity and the wide spectrum of interests and differences that form our sense of what it means to be a woman or a man. No single definition of manhood or womanhood is promoted. The young people are given centre stage, with input and guidance by the elders where necessary, to explore and share what they think and how they perceive their identity and gender roles. Constant feedback and acknowledgement during the process gives the participants a sense of wellbeing, confidence and safety. While encouraged and supported in their participation, the young people are in control of what they share, and to what level they engage with each part of the process. No one is forced to do anything.

Maintaining an element of surprise

Another characteristic that makes the Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure programme work is the element of surprise. Youth participants are given the broad brushstrokes and intentions of the programme, but not the details. Just as we don't want to give away the plot in a great book or an exciting movie, we want to maintain the element of surprise and mystery in these programmes. So, during the programme, participants have no idea as to what is coming up next. Before the programme starts, they have no idea where it will take place, where they will be sleeping, or what they will be eating. They only know that they will be going away for a specified length of time, and what to bring or not to bring. When parents are introduced to the programme, they are obviously given the content and details of the venue, but they are encouraged not to share this information with their son or daughter beforehand.

At the end of each programme, participants are encouraged not to give away the programme content to the next year's group. Because they have experienced the enjoyment and stimulation of not knowing what was coming next, of having to deal with the unexpected, the young people have maintained this protocol over the years.

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Keeping things simple

As the Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure programme has been running successfully for many years, we don't encourage chopping and changing it beyond whatever slight tweaking and updating is necessary. By keeping things simple and straightforward, the preparation each year is relatively

easy and straightforward for the parents who volunteer their time. It makes the training of new parent facilitators easier, and those who are returning do not have to relearn the programme each year but can simply get to understand the material and flow a bit better. It also means that the full focus of the facilitators can be on the young people themselves and not on changes and newly designed elements.

As the programme does not require fulltime professional facilitators, counsellors or psychologists, and relies on volunteer parents, it is important to keep things simple and accessible to ordinary folk who would like to do this work within their communities. Of course, having parents with related skills and experience, which is sometimes the case, is always welcomed and useful. And always having a couple of experienced elders on the team to provide guidance is also important.

Building a team

Building stable and supportive teams of women and men is critical to the success and sustainability of this work. We encourage different team members to coordinate different

functions, for example, logistics (transport, site booking, food and equipment), budgeting and scheduling of meetings, and team leading (forming the new team, facilitator training and preparation). Leaders tend to stay in position for a three-year period, which brings stability and allows time for new leaders to settle and grow in the leadership position. The three-year rotation also gives everyone who is interested in leading an opportunity to do so. The position of team leader does not have to be contested terrain, which contributes to a positive and supportive team environment, and means that the burden and extra responsibility and workload of leadership can be spread amongst the team. Because the current team is always consulted in the process of choosing the new leader, team members tend to be supportive. They also know they might be next in the position and in need of support themselves. Another factor that has contributed to the stability of the teams – and thus also of the programme – is continuity of long-term volunteer facilitators. A good balance between elders and past leaders and new volunteer facilitators is crucial. The elders and past leaders bring experience, while the new volunteers bring fresh insights. There is a role for all.

A strength of this programme is to create a space within which powerful conversations can take place between generations.



Participants, parents and teachers express their feelings about the Roots, Hearts and Wings Adventure

'The little-to-no positive male influence in my son's life has been a constant concern to me. Listening to him and seeing how he accepts and respects the individuality of each man and young man in the programme, and his growing awareness that he is not personally responsible for their actions and reactions, brings him a sense of relief and peace. I don't think it is possible to capture in words how invaluable the work is that you and your team do with these young men. For the boys who do not have access to men who are comfortable with being men and are living in the true power of being a man, you provide a gift that can never be taken away from them, can help guide them to their own embracing of manhood, and on which they can draw for the rest of their lives.'

Mother of a son

'The programme is a door. Your heart is the key. Use your key, unlock the door and step into the rest of your life.'

Young man

'The process allowed us to reflect on ourselves and get to know each other at a far deeper level. Our fathers sent us off, and our mothers welcomed us back as young women, no longer little girls.'

Young woman

'A woman has strengths that can amaze. She can handle trouble and carry heavy burdens. She holds happiness, love and opinions; smiles when she feels like screaming; sings when she feels like crying; cries when she is happy and laughs when she is afraid. She fights for what she believes in and

stands up against injustice. There is only one thing wrong with her: she forgets what she is worth; a woman is worth more than she will ever know. This programme taught me I have a voice, a voice I, myself, need to listen to.'

Young woman

'We want to thank you for your commitment in leading our students through this important transitional phase. It is like a pebble being dropped into a pool, where the ripple effect touches the young men and women, their class, the school, their family, and eventually the wider community.'

Teacher

'This is the age at which most young men are starting to find their own way in the world and have a growing need to stand on their own. By doing so they are telling the world they are unique and different from their mothers and fathers. This process allows the young men to be listened to without the distractions of the opposite sex. It is a time they can let their guard down and be themselves and get to know that self a little better. As a parent, teacher, dad and man, I only wish to present myself as authentically as possible to the young men over these five days. They need to see that men have flaws and that we can constantly work on ourselves to be better men, better parents and assets to our families, jobs and lives.'

Teacher and parent, Roy Davids





RUNNING WILD, BECOMING A LEADER — AN INTERVIEW WITH BRENDYN ALLOYS

The importance of grandparents

My name is Brendyn Paul Alloys. I come from an area called the Strand just outside of Cape Town. I was born in 1984, the oldest of three boys. My mother didn't marry my father; I'm not sure what happened to their relationship. They separated before I was born, so I never met my father. My mother married my stepfather and then my two half-brothers were conceived. My mom left to start a new life with her husband, so I didn't really have a close bond with them. I grew up with my grandparents who did the best they could to raise me.

My grandparents were good, religious, church-going people. They gave me an education and many of the opportunities that I had in my life. My grandmother, especially, helped me. I wear contact lenses now, but I used to wear spectacles. I can remember when I needed to go to the optometrist or when I needed new spectacles, she was the one who paid for it. She was basically the one who raised me. She sent me to a good primary school in Somerset West, which I completed.

It takes a community...

I grew up in a church environment, in a family with strong church roots and Christian values. I used to go to Sunday school and attend church on a regular basis. The amazing thing about our church was that we had connections with

other churches, from Lavender Hill all the way to Knysna and Wilderness. So, we used to travel a lot across the Western Cape. During the Easter holidays we always organised a church trip to Knysna or to the Klein Karoo and Calitzdorp.

My grandparents' involvement in the church had a great influence on me. One of the core values I learnt was respect for people; and the ability to admire and appreciate others. I observed people really admiring, appreciating, and showing respect for one another. I remember, there were people in the church who had enormous respect for my grandfather. Our church was about people uplifting one another, caring and being able to support and do good to others. These are some of the values that I experienced from my involvement. The church community was like a family to me. Some of the church folk saw a lot of potential in me; they somehow made me aware of my potential. This had a big influence on me.

Role models, heroes, mentors

At home, growing up without a father was really tough. At school or in other areas of my life, I could sense that a big part of my life was missing, even though my grandparents made such an effort to raise me, give me an education, and support me financially. Emotionally there was a kind of poverty within me. In some ways, I think the church compensated for that. There were a few leaders and other guys I looked up to. The way they conducted themselves, spoke and carried themselves made an impression on me. I was really fond of them and admired them for their abilities, charisma and positive attitudes.

At primary school, one teacher stood out for me. He was my Grade 2 teacher, Winston Baard. Mr Baard was one of those guys who really had an ability to notice and recognise potential, and he encouraged me. I think that's where my love



of history was born, and my fondness for ANC leaders like Govan and Thabo Mbeki, Walter Sisulu, and Nelson Mandela.

At our primary school we supported the New Zealand rugby team, the All Blacks, and we even had a close relationship with them.¹⁵ Because of that influence, we had our own haka that we performed on many an occasion. During the 1995 World Cup, the All Blacks came to South Africa. They stayed at the Lord Charles Hotel in Somerset West. Our school went to visit them and we had the opportunity to perform our haka for them. For some reason I was given the opportunity to speak one-on-one with the halfbacks Andrew Mehrtens and Justin Marshall. I also spoke with John Hart, the All Blacks coach at that time. What an amazing opportunity that was. And to perform the haka in front of our heroes! That was a highlight of my primary school years.

Winston Baard is still at my primary school, and until today, I still have a relationship with him. There are many amazing stories about Mr Baard; he made an enormous impact on students. One of the recent Springboks, Damian Willemse also went to our school. A few years ago, Mr Baard assisted Damian and a group of other guys from our school to attend a big rugby school in Stellenbosch. And today Damian is a Springbok! Recently, just before they left on tour, Damian visited the school and there was an article about him and the other 16 guys who got the opportunity to go to the famous Stellenbosch high school with him.

So, at different stages of my life, I had the good fortune to have people who were there for me. They guided, supported and acknowledged me, and they recognised some of my abilities. Even though I lacked the experience of having a father, I was blessed.

¹⁵ There is a long legacy in the Western Cape, dating back to apartheid and passed down through the years, of support for the All Blacks.

Running wild

I went to high school in Strand. I think the first or second year went well for me, but around Grade 10, I started to get involved with some negative stuff and got into trouble. There were some incidents in school that caused me to leave. I was smoking cigarettes, started to smoke dagga, and also got involved in some criminal activity. Four guys and I had a plan to steal one million rands in one year. We would come together and sit and talk and smoke and stuff. Then we would plan how we would steal the one million. For one or other reason, we thought if we got a million rand, it would make life better for us. So, we broke into some houses. I was very fortunate that I never went to prison. One morning, two of my friends broke into some houses and got caught in the act. They went on trial and got sentenced and were sent to Pollsmoor Prison. I was about 16 or 17 then. They were older than me, so they went to adult prison, and I just carried on. I think at that stage I had also left home; I didn't stay with my grandparents anymore. I stayed at my friend's place while he was in prison. For most of this time it carried on like this.

One evening one of my other mates and I went to do some break-ins in the Strand area. We sat under a bridge smoking, and then we went to the area where we did the break-ins. Somehow, we couldn't get the stuff out of a particular vehicle. I took a big pole that was lying in the yard and I stuck it through the back-seat window. This woke up the people of the house. The owner came out with a shotgun, so my friend started running away. He was running in a zig-zag pattern to avoid any shots. I was still in the yard, hiding behind a small wall, and when the owner passed by me, I ran away. I'm not sure how he missed me. I can remember it was near the railway station. I was sitting or lying



in the grass next to the railway tracks when the police came and caught me. The police told me that the owners had said the police must leave me, because they wanted to deal with me. I was taken to a cell in the police station, and I think it was my grandmother who paid an amount for bail. She got me a lawyer. Eventually the case was concluded, and I got a suspended sentence for five years. That was in 2003. That was the time I stopped with the criminal stuff.

Opening the door

I got a job making lanterns and chandeliers and stuff with a guy named Pierre le Roux. He was a friend of my grandfather.

I was quite involved and active in student affairs and leadership at our school – amazing, if you think I had been out of high school for two years!

My grandfather and Pierre's grandfather knew each other for many years, so that's how I got a job at Pierre's place. I was working there for some time, but then I decided that no, that's not what I wanted to do. So I decided to go back to school, which turned out to be very difficult.

I spoke to my grandparents, and then I went to see the Rusthof Secondary School principal, Mr John Gelandt. Our headmaster was a very tough guy, or he came across to me as a very tough guy. He was extremely reluctant to give me the opportunity to get back into school, because when I was there, I was smoking and selling cigarettes, and was involved in lots of fighting and

general misbehaviour. He didn't want to accept me back into the school. So, I went to see our local councillor, Andrew

Arnolds at that time. He listened to my story, and then went to my old school and persuaded the principal to give me a second chance. The influence of this man helping me to get back into education was crucial at that time. I was also very grateful to Mr Gelandt for giving me that opportunity to continue at his school.

The councillor also introduced me to Hearts of Men. He told me about the Hearts programme that was running in the high school. At the meeting with the principal, it had been agreed that I would join the programme, as an intervention to assist and support me to help me finish my schooling. I met some of the mentors who were part of the Hearts community project in the Strand – Sean, Lionel, Nico, and Heinrich came to the school and did presentations. They showed us photos of the camps, and they also explained the contents and aims of the programme. By then I had moved back to my grandparents, and Nico came to our home with the consent forms and other documents for us to sign. So that's how I started with Hearts of Men. That was in 2004 when I was in Grade 10.

For much of that time, in Grades 10, 11 and 12, I excelled academically in most of the subjects that I took. I was often the top student, and I was always among the top three. I was also a prefect and a member of the VCSV¹⁶, which was a religious society at our school. Many a time I addressed assembly at school. So, I was quite involved and active in student affairs and leadership at our school – amazing, if you think I had been out of high school for two years!

What it means to be a man

Hearts of Men had sessions on a Wednesday evening in the school, and I was introduced to the concept of mentoring. I spent a lot of time with my mentors, Sean and Lionel. Nico

16 VCSV: Verenigde Christelike Studente Vereniging (English is UCSA – United Christian Student Association)



was also one of the guys who facilitated some of the group sessions. During the first few weeks, we covered topics like different interpretations of manhood, and what being a man entails. We also spoke about some of the assumptions or perceptions we have around the work that men can or should do. We discussed how men are seldom involved in the early lives of children – at early childhood development centres, elementary school, or in primary school. Most of those who work with young children are women. One of the things that stood out for me was when a mentor, Heinrich, described his involvement with young children as a Sunday school teacher. I realised that men could be involved in the lives of children. Men could be teachers working with little ones. So, my perception that those jobs were only reserved for women was not necessarily true, because I realised that men also have the ability to care and nurture, and to look after the interests and the well-being of young children.

The Hearts programme made an enormous impact in my life. I met a lot of older men while participating in this programme, and I also met two young guys participating, Randall and Zennifer. They had completed the programme a year before me, but we formed a very close bond when I started the Hearts training.

Making peace with your father

After completing the first course, 'In the heart of a man', we went into the second course, 'Reclaiming manhood'. We spoke about men and their friends, making real male friends. In one of the sessions we dealt with 'fixing it with your father'. It was a thought provoking and emotional conversation, a very deep session. One of the things that I discovered in that session is that my father was my first and foremost connection, the key to my masculinity, my identity,

my manhood – whether he was in my life or not; absent or present. That sent a powerful message to me about the kind of man that he was, the type of father he was. During the session I discovered that one of the things I needed to do for myself was to evolve and grow as a man, and to do that I needed to make peace with who my father was, and the decisions that he had made.

One of the things that I realised in this session was, I am my father's son, but I am not his mistakes – so it follows I can't be defined by the mistakes he made. I also realised I didn't know what my father's experience was as a boy, a teenager, and a man; whether he had the opportunity to meet his father, to be raised by his father. This is not to make excuses for my father, but to try and understand who he was. That could help and guide me in terms of my own journey as a man, and in dealing with my experience of growing up without a father. Facing up to not knowing my own father was painful and difficult. It was a struggle internally, emotionally, and on a psychological level. The conversation around 'fixing it with your father' gave me the understanding that, despite his mistakes and shortcomings, despite the fact that he wasn't there, I could use this as an opportunity to grow and become stronger.

Other men's stories and experiences

In the Hearts course I was introduced to the book *Manhood* written by Steve Biddulph. One of the things he says is that 'your place of wounding is also your place of genius'. The areas in your life where you have been wounded, where you have struggled and suffered the most, where you are at a disadvantage – those are your places of genius, knowledge and experience. They give you the opportunity to become better and wiser. These life experiences can be used as a





Brendyn Alloys on a Hearts of Men wilderness experience

powerful example, allowing you to become a role model. You'll be able to make a significant impact on people when they hear your story. So, I learnt that your weakness can become your strength. As you become powerful in those areas, when you have the ability and opportunity to speak about the pain, you will be able to inspire and support others. So, I have been fortunate to have access to and be exposed to that kind of material.

Since then, I've 'written' a few letters to my father. I have 'spoken' to him. Not face-to-face, but I have expressed what I wanted to say to him. And I feel, at a deep emotional and psychological level, that has helped me to deal with the pain of rejection and abandonment. For many years I felt that I was not good enough for my father. And when my mother also left with another man, I felt I was not good enough for my mother, also. So, growing up with that pain of being rejected by both parents was really something that I had to deal with and overcome.

When I joined Hearts, their motto was 'men guiding boys to be men', and the programme was very much geared to older men as mentors, guiding and supporting us younger men on our journey into manhood. Older men just being there for us younger men was very significant. I remember in a conversation we had, someone referring to how young men used to go with old men into the bush to hunt. The older men would teach the younger men how to hunt, make weapons, and survive in the bush. These skills were passed on from one generation of men to the next generation of men. The older and younger men lived close to one another, so there was a strong relationship and connection between young men and older men, and skills were transferred. We reflected that nowadays this close connection between the generations has, in many cases, disappeared, and useful skills are not being passed on as they used to be.

Who are you?

Many of the Hearts sessions I attended on a weekly basis during my first year gave me an opportunity to discover myself as a young man. I learnt more and more about myself and my own identity. One of the questions asked in the third course, 'The Wild at Heart Adventure', is 'Who are you?' When in reply, you stated your name, they said, 'No, we're not asking for your name; we're asking, who are you?' That was very thought-provoking. It was deep and straight to the point and very challenging. You had to speak your truth. Sometimes a lot of the conversations were very uncomfortable.

This part of the programme was based away from home, in nature, where every young man had the opportunity to be by himself. One of things we used to say was 'If you travel far enough, then you will eventually find yourself'. The 'Wild at Heart Adventure' is an opportunity for men to travel very far



inside their own hearts, to discover more about themselves. It was also an opportunity for me as a young man to confront my feelings, my pain, my disappointment, my rejection, and to deal with these issues. One of the reasons we go to the mountains is because the mountains are silent. Mountains just listen.

I discovered that the 'shoulders' of a mountain are very big, so it can carry my sadness, rejection, wounds. It can absorb the things that have happened in my life, and even the mistakes that I made as a young man. And the mountains are vast and open – they gave us an opportunity to talk openly about things that we didn't easily talk about, because the mountains don't gossip or tell stories. They help you open up and become whatever you are, whatever you want to become.

Leading yourself

Then we returned home and to school. We began the fourth course, 'Taking a lead in life', a leadership development programme. We did a 'hot seat' exercise which gave us the opportunity to be held accountable for our behaviour, actions, the things we say and do.

I remember one of the questions we were asked: 'If you want to be a leader, then who is the first person that you need to lead?' I knew that I needed to be able to lead myself first, before leading others. We explored aspects of leadership and had an opportunity to do what we called 'clean up the mess' – a practice in accountability. This took us a step further; the importance of forgiveness. I realised that I needed to forgive people for what they'd done to me, that I now had the opportunity to do so, and that I could create such opportunities for myself. Also, that if I had wronged others, maybe I needed to make amends and ask for forgiveness myself. And so, this was another opportunity that gave me



Brendyn facilitating

the tools to go on a journey of forgiveness – forgiving myself and forgiving others.

Generations together

There were a few mentors that made a huge impact on my life. One of them was Des, who had an incredible amount of knowledge and understanding about working with men and boys. When he opened his mouth, I was just like a sponge, absorbing what he had to say. The way he conducted himself and talked about some of the issues that we as men face made an impression on me. I connected with him in a



significant and meaningful way. Some of the things that he said provided me with answers to my questions. He also had some church affiliation, and that was important to me.

I felt that Des had achieved and mastered so much. I can remember at that specific time, he had lots of challenges with his older son. His son also attended one of the wilderness camps and I could observe Des as a father, the way that he was fathering. I noticed, I watched, and I could see that some of the stuff was a struggle for him as a father; he was in his own pain. But he was still managing to be a role model and to do the right thing. He was very open about his life and his own story and his own pain. Maybe that was also the connection I felt with him. I benefitted a great deal from being in a circle with older men and young men together.

I learnt a lot from the older men's experiences.

...the role of mentors, of role models, in my life has been crucial. And now I am being called upon to be a mentor at home, in my community, and at work.

Successful studies

After Mr Gelandt witnessed the change in me, all my accomplishments, we became close friends. There were many times after I went back to school when we spent hours in his office just chatting and joking. We spoke about politics and rugby, and what was happening in the community. I think he became very proud of me. I think everybody else, all the other teachers and leaders at school, were also proud of me. This gave me so much pleasure.

Mr Gelandt retired a year or two ago. His wife is a social worker, and we

are colleagues now. Whenever I meet her at work or at a work function, whenever I speak to her, I can tell by her expression that she is overjoyed to see me. She doesn't really know me, but I get the sense that, through her husband, she knows about my journey, and the joy she shows me reflects how her husband feels.

So, to go back to the end of my school career, I did very well and passed matric with an exemption, which allowed me entry to university at Stellenbosch. But in my first year studying for a BA in political science, I discovered that my girlfriend Yolandi was pregnant with our first child. I had to make the decision to continue with the studies, or to support her and do what was best for our child. I felt it was best that I leave university to help Yolandi. It was a tough decision to make.

I didn't want to make the same mistakes that my father made, or create the impression that I was going in the same direction. But I was lucky in that, after leaving Stellenbosch, I was always involved in community work. I think it was in 2009 that talks began between Hearts of Men and the Department of Social Development. Funding came through in 2010 and I joined Hearts as a fulltime staff member.

And then, later, an opportunity came up for me at the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention. This allowed me to continue with studies. While there, I successfully completed a two-year NQF (National Qualifying Framework) Level 4 course in social work at Continuing Education for Africa (CEFA). After that I joined the Department of Social Development and did another NQF Level 4 course in child and youth care work. The first NQF course I did, I had to pay for myself. But the second course was paid for in full by the Department. We were about 200 students from five different facilities. From our facility, I was the third best student. So, at our graduation ceremony I received an award for being a top student.



From mentee to mentor, leaving a legacy

From growing up without a father, to dropping out of school and engaging in crime and receiving a criminal record, to returning to education, to having to leave university, to studying again – the role of mentors, of role models, in my life has been crucial. And now I am being called upon to be a mentor at home, in my community, and at work.

Firstly, I need to be a mentor at home for my two boys. I give them lots of guidance and support. I'm also involved in various projects in my community, so through these there are other youngsters who I am mentoring. And in my work at Lindelani (a place of safety) there are about 50 youngsters with whom I work on a regular basis when I am on day or night shift.

Coming from where I come from, I understand that children who need the most love will show it in the most unloving ways. Children who come from difficult backgrounds need extra effort and care in terms of their emotional connections – what we call rapport building. So, a lot of my work involves building relationships with the children who are in my care or who I'm mentoring. Once the relationship is established, I have an opportunity to influence them positively. Then we can talk about the importance of education and why they need to be in school; why they need to learn and cooperate with teachers and adults at school; why they need to sit and do their assignments. Most of the children that I mentor or work with come from the street. Most of them have been living on the street for months or years, or they have been out of school for months or years. Where I work at the secure facility, they attend school on the premises, not through mainstream education. I need to explain to them the

importance of being able to read and write, why they must have basic numeracy and literacy.

Besides encouraging them to learn, I face another challenge in mentoring these boys. They are at this institution because they are involved in gang activity. A lot of them want to be gangsters. The gang activity or the connection with the gang provides them with a sense of belonging and identity, but there is a lot of violence involved. So, normally, how I manage their behaviour is to say, 'I don't fight with my colleagues when we have conflict, or I don't swear at them when I disagree with them.' I tell them I will model the behaviour that I want them to display. 'So, when you make me angry, which is a lot of times, I don't fight with you, I don't hit you, I don't swear at you or push you. So, when you are angry at your friend or at one of your teachers, I don't want you to swear or to fight.' One of the things I learnt at Hearts of Men was that usually the only time a man looks at another man straight in his eyes is when they want to fight, when they are angry, when they are going to stab you, or when they are going to be violent. We get the young men to sit calmly and just look at one another – eye-to-eye. This process helps to shift their thinking about violence. Men can be together in ways that don't have to lead to violence. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. But

Children who come from difficult backgrounds need extra effort and care in terms of their emotional connections – what we call rapport building.





Brendyn at work in his community

As adults and mentors we must always role model the behaviour we want to see. If we demonstrate violence, we are teaching violence.

these are some of the practical things that I do with them.

It is a challenge to mentor these boys, but I find I can make a connection with them and, even if they display disruptive behaviour, because of the methods that I use, which are non-threatening and do not shame or humiliate them, they give me their cooperation. Because they come from such difficult backgrounds, it can take years and years to reverse the damage that has been done. Sometimes some of them flourish.

At work I also challenge colleagues who might have other ways of behaviour modification. We often have a conversation about our different methods. I might say, 'Listen here, if you're going to use violence as a tool to manage the behaviour, maybe you think it's going to be efficient. While I'm open

about it, I feel it's not the best way or method.' Some disagree, and some agree. A lot of my colleagues don't understand the enormous responsibility or the opportunity to influence or impact that we have. But the Department's protocol, the standard operating procedure, and the Children's Act state that there should be no violence.

What I believe is that I must make a lasting impact on children's lives. It must echo into eternity. I always go to work with a plan for what I need to do. Sometimes when people go to work without a plan, the easiest way to manage difficult behaviour is to use violence. Violence is a very easy method; anyone can use violence. As adults and mentors we must always role model the behaviour we want to see. If we demonstrate violence, we are teaching violence.





THE JOURNEY OF HEALING DOLPHIN

Nic Fine

This is Solomon (Solly) Marlow's story. I track his pathway over a period of 18 years, from being a rep for a fruit juice company to becoming a community programme developer and facilitator. Solly's story is a positive example of what providing good support, training, and ongoing mentoring can achieve. Of course, the ultimate credit for this achievement goes to the talent, commitment, and resilience of Solomon himself.

I met Solly in 2001, when he was in fulltime employment with a fruit juice company and his job was to go to shops and supermarkets to display the products. He was living with his wife and children in a temporary dwelling, in the backyard of his parents-in-law's house. Hearts of Men was running its first community mentorship programme in Bonteheuwel in the Western Cape, bringing young and older men together. Solly was acquainted with one of the facilitators, who introduced him to the programme, and he joined the very first group of volunteer men attending mentorship training. As part of the training, he received an animal name, Healing Dolphin, which represented qualities that the programme leaders saw in him.

When Solly completed the training, he was selected as a volunteer mentor on the HOM Golden Gate programme in Bonteheuwel and went on to support the group mentoring process for the youth participants, and to provide individual mentoring where necessary. At the end of that first year, the fruit juice company made Solly redundant and he became unemployed. He indicated his willingness to remain part of the Bonteheuwel programme, and was selected from the



Solomon (Solly) Marlow

first-year group of mentors as one of three interns to work as part of the facilitating team for the second intake of mentors and youth. The programme now spread to Kalksteenvontein, a second site within Bonteheuwel, which allowed the interns to gain further practical experience while receiving mentoring support from the programme facilitators. In its third year, HOM started two more programmes, which Solly worked on, gaining confidence and skills – now as a part-time member of the team.

Solly was encouraged and wanted to apply for positions in other youth focused organisations to gain work experience in different settings. He was offered a fulltime contract with an organisation that focused on supporting street-children, as an outreach worker with boys and girls living on the street. He also worked in the overnight shelter. At the end of this contract, Solly expressed a desire to do some youth





Solly with his brother and a young participant

work within his own community in Lotus River. At the same time, Hearts of Men was approached by the Western Cape Education Department to work with children in South Peninsula schools. Funding was secured and HOM contracted Solly to work in three primary schools in Lotus River. Solly also ran two very effective community programmes in Lotus River during this period. Both community programmes were started by one man with a simple idea that he was determined to put it into action.

The first community programme that Solly initiated is a great example of an elder using creative options to engage young people. He decided that his community needed to clean up the mess in the neighbourhood, and chose to begin the clean-up on the street where he lived. So, he started on his own with just a broom and a rubbish bag. In no time at all, children gathered around him and asked what he was doing.

'I'm cleaning up the street,' replied Solly.

'But that is the council's job,' they shouted.

'Yes, you're right, it is. But they need our support. It is our street after all, and it is our mess. So why not clean up our own streets, and not always having to wait for the council, who can't keep up with all this mess,' continued Solly. He had now accomplished three initial goals: the clean-up had started; as an elder, he was setting the example to youngsters in the community; and he had them engaged in a conversation. The next step was to get them to join him in sweeping and cleaning.

'We can also sweep,' said one youngster who wanted to join in the fun.

'Where can we get brooms?' asked another.

And so, Solly managed to gain the support of the children to assist him in this initiative. They agreed to meet on certain days at a pre-arranged time. Whoever turned up worked alongside Solly. He used this opportunity to chat to and engage with the young people as they cleaned together.

This initiative then gave birth to the next community programme. Together with his brother, who had also become a volunteer mentor on a HOM programme, Solly started a weekly youth football tournament. The teams were organised on a street-by-street basis, with each team encouraged to approach older men or women in their street to act as team managers and coaches. Training, practice sessions, and

preparation were left to each team to organise.

Every Saturday, all the teams gathered for a knockout tournament on an open field in Lotus River. Solly and his brother took turns to referee. All the teams were introduced to a strict set of rules, clearly communicated for all to hear. For example, there was to be no swearing, questioning of the referee's decisions, or fighting. Guidelines were announced for the issuing of yellow or red cards. Self-discipline, good behaviour, and sportsmanship were paramount. At the end of each Saturday's games, Solly and his brother handed out donated prizes and awards to the winners in various categories. The football programme proved to be a great success, engaging young people in what they loved doing, with the active support of elders in the community.

Meanwhile, HOM had received provincial government funding to increase its staff team and expand its field of operation, from Cape Town and Helderberg to the Overberg and Langeberg regions. At the end of his community-based contract, Solly joined HOM fulltime as a facilitator. As part of the team that expanded HOM's work from urban to rural areas in the Western Cape, Solly helped to establish a men's programme on a large wine farm outside Robertson. The farm managers were perturbed by the alcoholism and domestic violence prevalent among their resident workers. They also wanted input on organising life skills, sports, and cultural activities for the children and youngsters on the farm.

It didn't take long for Solly to weave his magic within the Robertson farming community. The farm management requested that, rather than having a HOM team coming to the farm for a few days a week, we appoint one facilitator who would work there every day and they would provide the accommodation. When we asked them who their preferred facilitator for this job was, they named Solomon. Solly took up



Solly at work on a Hearts of Men programme

this challenge to develop the work with adults and youngsters on the farm. He also supported the expansion of men and young men's circles in neighbouring communities, working with the coordinators of those programmes.

However, travelling home every weekend to spend time with his family in Cape Town eventually proved to be overwhelming. Also, being supported and managed at a distance by the HOM team based in Strand as well as by the farm management team in Robertson proved to be unnecessarily complicated. It was time to shift this relationship. In consultation with Solly and the farm management, Solly's contract was shifted from HOM to the farm staffing structure. The farm Trust provided the funding and bought a vehicle from HOM for Solly's use. They offered him a permanent house where he could bring his family to live, and assistance with school fees for one of his children. HOM assured Solly that they would continue to provide equipment, resources, training and mentorship.

At the time of writing, the farm Trust has encouraged





Solly Marlow

Solly to take the next step in his development: to come off staff salary and start his own project that would continue to provide services to the farm itself and to the surrounding communities. Once again, Solly has taken up this new challenge. With the support of the Trust, he has now registered his own independent organisation, CAMP (Community Action Mentoring Programme), formed a board, and opened a discreet bank account. In place of a monthly salary, the Trust now allocates annual funding to cover all organisational costs. Solly is also free to fundraise further.

Solly has formed a partnership with management on another farm that has loaned him a section of land on which he has built some wooden buildings to use for outdoor wilderness-based work. All materials were donated, and the labour was done by Solly himself with help from men who were part of his original farm circle – many of whom now serve as part of his new organisation's board. Having his own site on which to do his camps has always been a dream for Solomon. It also substantially reduces his programme costs.

While Solly continues to work on the original farm, he also works with youngsters in three local schools, focusing on issues of bullying and drug addiction. And he continues to bring mentors and young men, fathers and sons, and families together for outdoor programmes and gatherings. Healing Dolphin is certainly following his passion and living out his dreams.

We stay in contact, and whenever possible I support Solly and the work he is doing. I have always admired his infectious energy, passion, and enthusiasm for working with young boys and men in the community. I am proud of what he has achieved. Solly has never given up, and the commitment he has shown to this work is certainly recognised by his community and his funders. I hold fond memories of staffing alongside this creative, generous and inspiring man.

While all credit for Solomon Marlowe's achievements goes to him, he acknowledges the many opportunities made available to him by a support system that has helped him get where he is today; support from elders, facilitators, organisations, funders, programme participants, and many other individuals. His progress is an example of a man able to put into action all the input he receives through mentorship, opportunities and support, and to pass his knowledge, confidence and enthusiasm on to the next generation.



Solomon Marlow – in his own words

Solomon Jerome Marlow is the name given to me by my father, Solomon Jerome Slaai.

My father grew up in a Catholic orphanage in Langa, Cape Town. He met my mother in Sea Point, Cape Town when she was working at the butcher counter at Pick 'n Pay. My mother never knew her father. She grew up in Dorp Street in the centre of Cape Town, with her mother who was a single parent.

My mother got married to her first husband in Cape Town and had two children with him. He had a substance abuse problem, so she left him and partnered up with my father, Solomon, who accepted her with her two children. Because of the apartheid Group Areas Act, they were removed from Cape Town to Cooks Bush, which became Grassy Park. Today some people still call it Koek se Bos. This was a holding squatter camp for people to stay in before they were given homes on the Cape Flats. Koek se Bos became my birthplace.

After completing school, I went into merchandising, supplying shops. Soon I noticed that the retail business was not for me, and I shifted to City Mission, a church organisation that worked with street children in central Cape Town. My interest was always to work with youth, but I needed knowledge to do programmes with them. After City Mission, I met Des van Niekerk who recruited me into a mentorship programme in Hearts of Men. There I learnt a lot of practical ways to interact with youth and men in group sessions. Mentally, emotionally and spiritually, I became strong, especially during the men's group sessions. My main challenge was to address my personal issues that kept me from accomplishing my goals. I received an animal name,

Healing Dolphin, which indicates being more than an 'overcomer' – first I had undertaken the journey of healing myself, then I moved on to facilitate the healing of others.

Hearts of Men employed me in doing community work and I realised that I enjoy working with youth. I am grateful for the support of friends like Lionel Arnolds and Nic Fine. Later, others came along who also had a definite impact on my life, like Mike Abrams, Nolan Abrahams, Nico Beukes, Patrick Macqueen, Fernando Hendricks, Shaun Phillips, Mzi Noji, to name a few. I still enjoy what I'm doing now that I've got my own organisation, CAMP (Community Action Mentor Project), and I thank God daily for bringing me this far.

I would like to render a special acknowledgement to Des van Niekerk, who has been both a mentor and a good friend. I met him in church as a new convert, and we as a family were shifted to his home-cell for spiritual growth. Somehow, he saw my heart and knew that I was eager to learn more. He recruited me to be part of HOM, to learn practical ways to develop my skills in community work. I can still remember his words, 'Stick with me and I'll take you places.' Des trained me to be content with my vision for the work that I'm doing. Together, we have built bridges in relationships with many communities. Today his investment in my life stream is manifest in goodness. Des, I salute you for doing great work and today I follow suit, thank you.

... first I had undertaken the journey of healing myself, then I moved on to facilitate the healing of others.





RETURNING HOME AS AN ELDER

Hilaire Ossang Akollo

'A long sojourn of a tree in water would never turn it into a fish'

I had stayed away from my fatherland and home country, Cameroon, for about a decade, and it was an exciting prospect to return. I also felt ambivalent, for I was wondering how I would be received by my peers, family and friends. I knew that many, while being excited to see me again, would have an axe to grind, for my long absence would not be tolerated.

So much had happened during my absence: I had lost both my parents and my elder sisters, indeed most of my

uncles and aunts had passed on due to illness and old age; and so many children had been born to the family. In short, things were very different. In addition, I had become the de facto head of the family and my input as an elder was important. Although I was living in South Africa, I was expected to oversee the smooth running of family affairs.

The reception I received, although not grandiose, was heart-warming and made me realise the truth of the saying, 'a long sojourn of a tree in water would never turn

it into a fish'. I was home once again and happy to be with my family. The embraces I received were surreal. My younger

sister, not believing that it was really me had to basically feel my arms and legs. The excitement was at the highest.

It is true, I was no longer accustomed to the searing, humid weather of Cameroon. The place was so hot that I wondered how I had managed to grow up and study under such conditions, but it was home. And the variety of food was simply out of this world. I indulged in eating as much as I could and had the pleasure of ordering whatever I liked from my sisters. I was treated like a king. Moreover, I felt safe. Movement was not limited to daylight hours and public transport was available and frequent. I could go daily to a local pub, where a disc jockey played the best local music, and return on foot very late, without any worries about being robbed or mugged.

Changes and challenges in Cameroon

However, I realised that Cameroon has changed. I did not recognise Douala. There is disorderly development everywhere in the city and new roads and quarters abound. Having lived in South Africa for so long, I wondered what role the municipal council was playing. Nobody I spoke to seemed to care, saying, 'Politics cannot put food on the table.' In fact, to many of them it appears as if the government does not exist, or maybe it is only good for stealing money.

In stark contrast to the official discourse that the country is in crisis, the building sector is in full expansion. Houses and buildings are mushrooming, funded by hard cash as Cameroonians do not rely on loans from financial institutions. They prefer saving instead of taking credit. The fine state of the economy could also be defined by the way Cameroonians spend money on entertainment, and the amount of alcohol consumed during and after work hours. One can feel money circulating everywhere. People use and abuse it.

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Although the common belief is that those of us who live abroad are well off, I do not agree. I may have access to better sanitation and healthcare, but I cannot compete with my friends in Cameroon, most of whom are well settled with families and children. They have steady jobs, wherein they have accumulated a wealth of experience, and they have all built houses. They have healthy bank accounts and owe nothing. An analysis of the situation made me wonder how and where I would be now if I had not been forced to flee the country as a young and inexperienced journalist.

Changes and challenges in my family

While I was glad to meet my family again, to share stories with my brothers and sisters, and to catch up on all the lost time, I realised that things had changed for the worse at my home. Underneath the happy-go-lucky ambiance and harmony hid a spectrum of disdain, quarrels and squabbles, some of which had brought intense hatred of one another. No wonder an uncle to whom I had spoken about my planned arrival back home had said that he was happy that I was returning because there were too many issues to sort out in the family. He was right.

I found a headless family in total disarray, in which each member acted only to satisfy their own self-interests. I found a family wherein several of my junior brothers had proclaimed themselves as heads of the family and claimed they had the authority to make decisions on behalf of the others. I found a family where two of my brothers had been at loggerheads for the past five years, and the tension between them was so intense we feared that, should they be left alone in a room, the one could maim or even kill the other. I found a family wherein children had gone rogue, disrespecting their elders, undermining the authority of their parents and

teachers, and fighting with neighbours. One of these children had been taken to court by a neighbour who alleged he had been beaten badly by the youngster. I found a family wherein money governed seniority; the authority of those without money was undermined, as nobody tended to listen to the poor. This was in sharp contrast to what our parents had taught us – money should never come into play in the relationship between brothers and sisters, nor determine whether to consider or obey the other. I found a family plagued by gossip and hearsay, wherein nobody tried to find the truth before considering what was said. In a nutshell, it was a dysfunctional, leaderless family in dire need of redress.

I did not return home to solve problems, nor did I ever think that so much discomfort, disrespect, slandering and infighting would find its cradle in our home. I went home to relax and reconnect with my loved ones, to re-immense myself in our cultural value system, and speak once again my vernacular language, which I had started to forget from lack of practice. I went home to share my stories of the life I have lived during my long stay away, to meet my siblings' husbands, wives and children whom I had only seen in photographs, and to be informed on their prospects for the future and their life aspirations. I went home to pay my respects to those of my family members who had passed away during my absence and to perform the necessary rites I was bound to, according to our customs. I went home to meet my friends and spend countless hours discussing matters of import, and although my days of heavy drinking are behind me, to visit the local pubs and night clubs to enjoy good music and watch the colourful performers of the night at work. In brief, I went home because I simply wanted to unwind and forget about all the stressful matters that life presents to us. Besides paying my respects to the



deceased family members, it was never my intention to delve into anything that required much concentration, planning and seriousness.

However, as the eldest living child of my parents and consequently the one on whose shoulders rests the

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responsibility to steer the family ship, the onus fell on me to unite the family and ensure that all differences were attended to. I did not know how much trouble awaited me upon my return home, and none of my siblings warned me, for they knew that I would not be effective in the discharging of duty when I was far away from home. As head of the family, I am expected to be impartial in any dispute resolution and to show no preference to any sibling while discharging my responsibility. So, my siblings silently and patiently waited for me. I could not renege on the duty bestowed on me because I would hence disgrace my parents and perhaps become subject to a course of

action that would require a whole array of rites and sacrifices to cleanse the malediction.

Was I ready for a job of this magnitude? The disadvantage of living abroad for so long was that I was not properly informed of the realities back at home. As the third child of my parents, I had known that I was properly shielded and that such responsibility would always be that of my elder sisters; I never expected their premature deaths. However, I had certainly gathered much experience throughout my life, and I had also undergone personal development training and had facilitated

on a youth mentoring programme for over a decade. So, I felt I had some tools and experience for the task.

Preparation – laying the foundations through communication

As I have said, one of the main reasons for my trip home was to pay my respects to my fallen parents and sisters and perform the required rites. Most importantly, I wanted to fulfil the last wish of my mother. On her dying bed, she requested that I should say goodbye to her at her graveside, to drink and pour, as libation, spring water on her grave. Such rites, when performed, require that all the family be gathered to support the person subjected to the rite. I therefore knew that I had to inform the whole family and request that they be present for the ceremony. This family reunion was the perfect opportunity for me to call a general meeting, for I knew all members would be present. However, having heard all that was told to me, I realised it was paramount that I prepare adequately if I wanted to achieve anything. Otherwise, the meeting would turn into yet another family gathering where people just attend to eat, drink and talk nonsense, then disband without any concrete resolution reached or problem solved.

It was a daunting task, for it was my very first assignment as head of the family, and failure would bring scorn and disdain. I faced the risk of losing the authority in the eyes of my siblings that my birthright gave me. It was necessary, therefore, for me to have my facts correct from the onset if I hoped to chair the meeting with some possibility of success. I had already heard complaints from everybody, but I needed to get each story from the concerned persons themselves.



The power of listening

My family is spread across the country, but I undertook to travel to each and every person concerned, to get their version of the story. It was a tedious task that involved a lot of travelling and patience. I reported to every person and waited until they were available to have a session with me. In essence, I was there to listen and give the speaker my undivided attention. I interrupted only when I needed clarification on a point. Because there were no other family members present, these side meetings gave the interlocutor the freedom and confidence to speak, and to air their views freely. Just listening to someone empowers them to share their story with someone who cares. Often, we are not listened to. I also felt the power of listening, which is a very difficult exercise when one thinks of the usual interruptions we are subject to in our daily lives.

At the end of each meeting, I summed up the essential points of the conversation, to ensure that I had heard the speaker correctly and had not misconstrued anything. I then thanked the family member for their input. Although they were already aware of the upcoming ceremony to be held at my mother's home, I invited them personally, a sign that they were appreciated and welcome.

Despite the importance I accorded to the family meeting I intended to hold after the ceremony, I concealed the information from all and rather stressed how much it would mean to me that they attend the ceremony. My reason for catching all unaware was twofold: if some knew about the special meeting in advance, they would not attend and also, I wanted no one to have time to concoct a story to their liking, or to find sympathetic allies within the family. For my part, I was confident that I had gathered more than enough reliable information, heard all parties' versions of the facts, and could

facilitate and lead with a clear and sharp mind. Gathering the information also helped me design an agenda for the meeting, for I had a solid background to all the issues to be thrashed out.

Setting up – taking care of all the details

My individual visits to each member of the family bore fruits, for I was blessed to have the whole family gathered at my mother's home for the traditional rite I had travelled home to perform. They came not only because they ought to, but also because they had been invited by someone who respected them. Besides, my strategy worked perfectly, because nobody suspected up until the last minute that I also wanted them there for another reason. At the end of the ceremony, I announced calmly but authoritatively that no one should leave before attending a family meeting. Very firmly I told my siblings and other family members present that whoever dared to leave without attending the meeting I was calling would have to answer to me personally – as per our custom and tradition when a family head was disrespected – and face my wrath. Unsurprisingly, each of the feuding brothers approached me to excuse themselves, but their request was refused.

To be able to run the meeting effectively, I knew that I would need to create a setting that commanded respect and

At the end of each meeting, I summed up the essential points of the conversation, to ensure that I had heard the speaker correctly and had not misconstrued anything.





The young generation attending the family meeting

obedience. I was holding the meeting in my late mother's house. How befitting, then, to bring my mother into our midst at such an important rendezvous! The house's lounge is quite big and can easily accommodate forty people. I therefore set chairs all around it and installed a large-framed picture of my mother on the most predominant one. This was a symbolic way of bringing her into the room and a sign that we were holding the meeting in her memory and would not stray from the values she had taught us. It indicated that, because we were holding the meeting in her honour, we would not leave as foes, but as loving brothers and sisters – for she was a great unifier and convenor. It was a sign of respect and a call on her spirit to assist us in running the processes smoothly; a call for peace and trust in our midst and a reminder that, despite her passing away, she was not

gone; she was watching over us and would forever remain among us.

True to our tradition, and conscious that the presence of all – young and old – was required at the meeting, ladies were tasked to prepare food so that we could nourish ourselves and nurture our relationships after what we anticipated to be a draining day. Drinks were also prepared to be shared by all. The planned meal would be special, marking the strengthening of our family values and the confirmation of the unbreakable bond between us as brothers and sisters, despite the discussion of difficult issues. The celebratory meal also meant that none would be departing our mother's house angry or as the enemy, and would ensure that there were no traitors in our midst. It would also signal the fact that we were binding ourselves to all the resolutions taken at the meeting, and anyone reneging on this would have to answer for their actions.

Facilitating the meeting – getting down to business

When the family finally sat down for the meeting, it was imperative that the issue of authority be cleared up before engaging in the issues at hand. It was necessary to ensure that a clear voice presided over the meeting, with a deciding veto when there was an impasse, and the authority to change the topic or steer the meeting in any direction deemed fit. Establishing authority beforehand would also assist in controlling boisterous elements who might want to lead the proceedings astray, for the meeting not to achieve anything constructive. These elements would know that they could not do as they pleased, for they would be called to order. They would be at the mercy of the person in authority chairing

the meeting. Unsurprisingly, when I questioned the assembly whether anyone present contested my authority as head of the family, nobody opposed me. The unanimous agreement on my authority in the family quelled the chancers and partisans of disorder who bragged on the sidelines that they were in fact head of the family. This exercise effectively ended their futile attempt of claiming leadership and control.

I then, as a newly confirmed leader, presented the agenda to the assembly. I was empowered to draw the line, call the shots, and decide what was relevant and worth being discussed in the forum, and what could be attended to at a later stage or be resolved without the help and input of the whole family. The painstaking listening exercise I had undertaken in preparation meant that I could confidently weigh up and decide what was worth discussing in the assembly. Of the several issues and complaints, I selected the following to be discussed:

- the bad behaviour of a cantankerous nephew who respected no one and did just as he pleased,
- the pending court case with the neighbour on matters related to a dispute on the delimitation of the boundary between him and my late mother's property,
- and, of course, the dispute between the two brothers that had escalated uncontrollably.

The conditions emanating from their dispute were so dire that all previous attempts to get it resolved by the family had ended in failure. It was the biggest issue of the day and therefore classified as the main focus of the meeting into which we should pour our energy.



Photo of Hilaire's mother alongside his brother-in-law, Martin Mbitang

Inviting my late mother into the room

Before commencing the debate, I ensured to bring to the attention of the assembly that our late mother was sitting among us, that she occupied a prominent space among us, and that we should never forget that we had engaged in this debate to honour her and to emulate her teaching of righteousness, tolerance and virtue; that we called on her to give us wisdom to reach constructive resolution, and vowed to respect whatever decision we would reach; and that the onus rested on each person present not to do anything that she would not approve of. I also reminded those gathering that in her time, our home was the meeting place of all – family members, neighbours and even strangers; that she was so welcoming that she would share the last provisions she had with whoever knocked on her door and would do what she could to prevent anyone from going to bed at the end of the day bearing a grudge; that she always professed unity



and the prevalence of a family that stood together as one, a family wherein all differences could be solved, no matter how serious they could be. I reminded them that brotherhood and sisterhood is a sacred thing, for we did not choose to be siblings, but it was a God-given wish and decision that ought to be respected, no matter what; and our distracting

and damaging emotions could never be the true reflection of ourselves, of who we really were.

The issue of the unruly nephew was dealt with speedily. Several, if not all members of the assembly found it the perfect opportunity to tell the young man that they disapproved of his behaviour. Harsh words were traded and although he was given the opportunity to defend himself

and justify his behaviour, he could not get off the hook. In the end, he was and remained our relative and the onus rested on the older folks to give him direction. As Chair, I reassured him that we did not want to bring him down; our reprimand was a labour of love and not one of hate and disdain. We were rather concerned that his attitude might seriously dent his growth, both within the family and in the marketplace of life in general, for people might refrain from giving him a chance to prove himself: despite his confidence, which we found at the time displaced, a realignment was crucial for his growth and success. We closed the chapter, as good 'parents', with a warm embrace, where each family member had the chance to give him a blessing.

Making peace with our neighbour

The impending court case with the neighbour, however,

seemed headed for a stalemate. I implored for the forgiveness of all and the friendly resolution of the dispute on the matter of the border separating our mother's plot from that of the neighbour. However, the family was unanimous in their view that they had tried everything in their power to sort the matter out amicably, and only the court would be able to decide.

Just when I thought all was lost and was contemplating aligning myself with the wishes of the family, something special happened: my wondering eyes noticed movement on the neighbour's compound and to my surprise it seemed to be the neighbour himself inspecting his property. I had never seen him before, but his moves intuitively indicated to me that he was the owner of the place. He was not supposed to be there at that time, for he lives in another town and only very seldom came there. He had hired the services of a gentleman who lives on the property to look after it. What was he doing there at such an odd time? Was it the spirit of our mother who dragged him there for us to find an amicable solution to the problem? I called for a break in proceedings and decided to go and meet him.

I was received warmly by the stocky man after I introduced myself as the head of the family. Having invited me in, he deplored the behaviour of my family members and regretted that it required a legal case to resolve a simple boundary dispute. He also brought out a surveyor's drawing that mapped his property and told me about his plans for expansion. He expressed his regret at not to be able to offer me anything to drink, as he had just arrived and had not had time to get supplies – his house was as 'dry as the desert'. His attitude reminded me of how good neighbourly life had been when my mother had been alive and how, even for a while after her death, they used to assist each other and how

*I reminded
them that
brotherhood
and sisterhood
is a sacred thing*



at that time his door had always been open to my family.

On the issue of the court case, I was surprised by how accommodating he was about solving it amicably and his readiness to cooperate with me. However, because such a potentially amicable resolution needed adequate preparation, we exchanged numbers and promised to call each other to discuss further steps. I can proudly say at this juncture that we indeed communicated via telephone and subsequently held a meeting with both family members and community leaders present.

'The dead are never dead'

As a trained negotiator, with proven practical skills acquired in the field, I was confident engaging with our neighbour. However, I strongly believe that the spirit of my mother hovered over us throughout the proceedings. She was a peaceful person, and her spirit was surely not happy to see her household embroiled in an ugly battle for a few meaningless centimetres of land with a neighbour with whom she entertained a warm and cordial relationship. The ease with which our neighbour accommodated a resolution is a sure sign of her presence for, as we say in Cameroon, 'the dead are never dead'.

I do not believe in the maxim that a good negotiation is one in which parties reach a fifty-fifty agreement; my belief is that parties engaged in negotiation must be fully satisfied. In the case of our dispute, the issue we were negotiating was peace of mind and in that meeting, both parties were fully satisfied with the agreement we reached. We drew fresh borderlines and agreed on how we would build the common fence that separated his property from my mother's. While he agreed to withdraw his case, I ensured that certain members of my family did not attend the meeting, as per his request.

So, in the end, with a bit of poise, courtesy and a smile, I managed to solve a problem that had proven too much for those of my family who had claimed to be the leaders. As neighbours, we are now both happy and have resumed cordial and respectful interactions with one another.

Brothers at war; brothers united

After an unusually long recess, I called for the resumption of the family meeting. I did not want to jeopardise the process our neighbour and I had just started, and so I immediately prohibited all family members from engaging with him, saying I would not tolerate any interference. This strict injunction led us very nicely, after a long moment of looseness and laughter, to the seriousness of the matter at hand, namely the resolution of the dispute between my two warring brothers.

We had barely returned to the room when the tension between the brothers reached its peak; both foes were up in arms, ready to fight. The atmosphere in the room was tense and on the faces in the assembly the feeling of doubt and worry could easily be read. The fact that I had managed to bring the two brothers to sit in the same room was already a victory, but we all knew that all previous attempts to broker peace between them, even by our most senior and respected uncles, had not worked. How could I think that I would succeed where our patriarchs had failed?

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I remained stone cold and unmoved amidst this commotion. I might sound cynical, but in a way I felt amused as I watched members of my family jump left and right, begging the two gladiators to stop all the wrestling

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around, and trying to calm my warrior brothers down. Although I knew that somebody could be hurt in the process, I was reassured by several things: first, I knew my siblings very well and could assess how far they would go; second, although they were indeed angry at each other, the warriors were also enjoying their moment as they managed to draw everyone's attention; third, the love and adulation that we all have for our late mother is unquestionable and, bearing in mind the fact that the meeting had been called in her honour, and that in this set-up she was present with us, neither of them would dare raise his hand violently to the other, for he would have breached one of my mother's cardinal values – for

us to remain closely bound to one another, no matter what; and, finally, I knew it was primordial that the warriors let out all their anger. That was important so we could then move on.

Therefore, having assessed the situation, after a short while I felt the time was right to act. I called on all who were trying to break up the fight to sit down, and to let the two brothers fight. I knew that they would not obey my command to fight, and, indeed they both froze, remaining motionless in the middle of the room, staring at each other scornfully. Now that they were under my control, I pushed a bit more, for it

was necessary to extract all anger and resentment they felt towards each other. I reiterated my request for them to fight, but not one of them moved. Satisfied that they were now amenable to work with, I called for another recess and sent for water from the spring. I was certain that the recess would help calm the tense atmosphere that was dominating the room; it would also be the perfect time for those who were unsuccessful at breaking the fight to soothe and comfort the brothers who shunned each other.

Upon the return of my sisters with the water I had sent for, we reconvened in the room. I then asked each of the brothers whether he had something more to say to his sibling, now that their emotions were out of the way. They, each in turn, gave long litanies of deceptions they had been subjected to by the other, complaining that they could not believe that such insanities could come from their own sibling who was supposed to protect them instead. They agreed that the money transaction that had brought the almost irreparable rift between them was in fact irrelevant, and that it was the nature of their relationship that had caused most of the damage. Neither one could believe how the other would stoop so low, discarding the values instilled in them by our mother, for a fistful of coins. They expressed how, deep down, they loved each other and truly regretted what had happened between them. They both conceded that they had been too proud to humble themselves and take responsibility for their actions, but now that all had been openly said and they had shed their anger, they were ready for a fresh start.

On the brighter side, this episode helped them discover themselves further and understand better their brother's and their own temperament. It helped establish the boundaries beyond which they should not cross in fear of pushing



each other to the edge. They apologised to the family for the grief their stupidity caused and committed to seeking the blessings of the uncle and patriarch who had tried unsuccessfully to bring them together. The two brothers, now sobbing, ended their plea for forgiveness with a warm embrace that triggered clapping and a yuh-yuh call from all in the room.

To close off this part of the proceedings, I gave a long homily, professing the importance of family, specifically of brotherhood, to the now reconciled brothers. I reminded them of the values of our culture and tradition that were instilled in all of us by our late mother to respect the wisdom of the elderly. I ended by thanking them for agreeing to go through such a difficult process and for finally finding the room to forgive each other. The floor was then open for a round of encouragement and appreciation from all in the room. The brothers silently received blessings of all sorts from their siblings. One could sense a feeling of relief and excitement. Something magical had just happened. How had we achieved it? I knew, deep down, that the spirit of our late mother had been with us and had moved us.

The earlier skirmish, although not planned, had helped to solve the problem. It had enabled the brothers to see clearly and understand that they had been caught up in unnecessary strife that was bound to lead them to their ruin. They realised that they still loved each other and that the cause of their dispute was, in fact, trivial. Both had been trapped by their egos and that is why neither of them had been prepared to humble himself and accept that they were both wrong. The skirmish had also served as their plea to be heard and provided me with the perfect platform to resolve the issue: they had spoken through their standoff, dealt with all that had stopped them from speaking before, extracted all



Attending the family meeting

the anger they had brewed for years, and were now empty and ready to receive some sensible advice and to start afresh with more serenity. Most importantly, they were now able to start catching up on those lost years during which foolish pride, driven by egocentric behaviour, had deprived them of enjoying their bond of brotherhood and caused them to miss out on so many family events, simply because they had not wanted to be in the same venue at the same time.

Healing waters

The 'water ceremony' took place outside around our mother's grave. We were lucky that she was buried in our compound and so we did not have to travel far to perform it. Conscious of the fact that both brothers drank alcohol, we added a bottle of beer and one of red wine to the water. We then gathered round the grave, and I led the ceremony, standing at the end where our mother's head lay, with one brother standing on each side. Each brother was invited to speak his



I was relieved that we had recovered the peace and harmony that had gone missing for a few years from our family.

mind openly and freely to our mother, to ask for forgiveness for his erring way, and finally to ask for her blessing. To close off, they were then invited to pour some of the water, wine and beer on the grave for our mother's consumption in a ceremonial libation, and to share it between themselves before passing it on to each person standing around the grave.

We closed the meeting with the celebratory meal prepared earlier. The mood was light and jovial. We were celebrating our newly revitalised family bonds. Smiles and small talk showed that we appreciated all that had happened during the day. Although the meeting had taken about eight hours, nobody felt tired. For me personally, it was a moment I would treasure forever: it was the first time I was enjoying the presence of all my siblings in one place after a long stay abroad; I was eating the best food that could come out of a pot, and mainly I was relieved that we had recovered the peace and harmony that had gone missing for a few years from our family.

I thank you for reading my story

I have now made my life in South Africa, and I unfortunately had to leave my family and return to that country. When revisiting what happened during my stay in Cameroon, I cannot but be grateful to all the people who have influenced me in my life. Although I am proud of the good education I received, I would not be who I have become without the many lessons I received from them, coupled with the uncountable experiences and challenges I have been through in my life. All this humbles me and makes me realise how blessed I have been and still am to even have the energy to write these words. I hope that in one way or another, this story might help another soul someday. I thank you for reading my story.





MY JOURNEY THROUGH THIS WORK

Nic Fine

A young colleague once asked me, 'How did you get to do the work that you are doing today? What is your story?' He was busy exploring how to build and negotiate his own career path, working with youngsters in his community. More recently, another colleague on our Hearts of Men management team commented, 'From reading all these [stories I have shared in this book], I still have no idea how you came to be doing this work. Tell us that story.'

Where do I begin?

My short answer is that when I started my adult life I had little idea as to what I wanted to do. I wanted to work with young people, but where and how I did not know. I did know what I did not want – I knew an office job was not for me, and I didn't want to work within a large hierarchical organisation. But the rest I needed to discover. I went with the first opportunity that came my way, and then took things one step at a time, with no long-term plan in place. I discovered that just by being in motion and learning with each new opportunity, surprising doors opened for me. One thing always led to another, and this is where I find myself today. And luckily for me, in my journey I experienced incredible learning through several organisations and leaders I was fortunate enough to meet and work with on the way.

Now to the longer answer to that question...

You could be a lawyer one day!

My journey possibly started with my mother saying, 'You have a good mind. You could be a lawyer one day.' That

message stayed with me for a long time. In South Africa at the time it meant studying Latin as a subject at school, which meant choosing early on between the academic stream and taking more practical subjects. Looking back now at how much I enjoy working with my hands, assembling all kinds of objects and art pieces, I would have loved to do metalwork and woodwork as school subjects. But that was not the future that my mother had identified for me. And so, with no other clear idea in mind after finishing school, I enrolled at university for a law degree. While studying law, I discovered that I was more interested in the behaviours, motivations, and backgrounds of those who transgressed the law and who were resident in our youth detention centres and adult prisons. So, I added sociology and English literature to my degree and decided not to pursue my legal studies to postgraduate level. At that time, I also joined the student drama society, where we wrote and directed our own plays.

After completing my studies, I was accepted for a teaching post at a reform school, which catered for young people in trouble with the law, having been sentenced to a youth custody centre. I never took up that job offer but was to return to this career focus many years later, via my theatre and storytelling work.

Theatre work

At the same time as I received the teaching job offer, I was offered a job at The Space Theatre in Cape Town, where black and white South Africans worked together and produced groundbreaking productions that focused on the lives, desires, and struggles of ordinary people. This was at a time when apartheid laws forbade such collaborative work between the races, and the opportunity was too exciting and challenging not to accept. I decided that now was the time to



pursue the theatre route; I could always return to my focus on youth at risk and youth development later.

The Space Theatre introduced me to a whole new world. I had lived a sheltered life as a white child and young man, attended a racially segregated school, undertaken compulsory military training in the South African Defence Force (SADF), and gone to a whites-only university, so I had

never experienced working as an equal alongside black South Africans. My time at The Space Theatre taught me a huge amount about living and working with my fellow citizens. It also exposed me to the stories of those whose life experiences were quite different from mine. These stories altered my world view and began to influence my road ahead.

My time at The Space Theatre ended abruptly after about 18 months, when the SADF called me up for the first time to active service in Angola with my combat unit. I was given one month's notice and advised to ensure my personal Will was in place before my departure. After my political awakening at university and through my work experience at The Space Theatre, I was determined not

to report for duty in an armed conflict I didn't believe in. And so, to avoid imprisonment for refusing to serve, I chose to leave South Africa hastily, not knowing if I would ever return. This was in 1980.

Riverside Studios, a theatre based in London that

hosted international tours, offered me my first job abroad. The director of Riverside Studios, who had already hosted several South African touring productions from The Space and Market theatres, was familiar with the political situation there and so welcomed me into his theatre with open arms. At Riverside I was exposed to the work of companies from all over Europe, Asia and South America. This experience certainly opened my eyes to new cultures and ideas.

While at Riverside, I was introduced to an amazing theatre company for people with disabilities, which toured throughout the UK and Europe. They created their own shows focusing on the challenges of living life with a disability in a world not always accommodating to them and having to face prejudice daily. I later became involved in directing this company, and we created a personal storytelling piece, in which the actors related experiences from their own lives. I didn't know it at the time, but this eventually set me on a path in which personal storytelling was a key component of my work.

Several years later, I became involved in directing a youth theatre production that toured the UK, performing in community and youth custody centres. It told the story of Andrew Zondo, a young man in South Africa. As part of the production, we held workshops after the show to engage the audience in discussion on whether the use of violence in certain circumstances was acceptable. It led to some interesting and provocative debates. After a while I began to realise that I was more interested in the workshops than I was in the show itself. I was slowly returning to my roots. While we were on the road, moving from one city to the next, I also discovered that I was fascinated by the personal struggles the actors, all in their early twenties, were facing in their own lives. In addition, I realised that I didn't have all the skills I needed to

...exposed me to the stories of those whose life experiences were quite different from mine. These stories altered my world view and began to influence my road ahead.



deal with the interpersonal disputes and conflicts that arose from time to time in the group.

Youth work

When an opportunity arose for me to have a fulltime and longer-term contract in researching and developing materials and resources within the UK Youth Service, I grabbed it with both hands. This would provide me with the skills and experience I needed to design programmes for high risk young people in conflict and to develop the right workshop techniques and approaches. During this time, I was part of a team that developed a special programme for young offenders in the largest youth custody centre in Europe for young men. The work introduced me to working in prisons within the UK and the USA, and led to me being part of developing innovative youth-at-risk community-based programmes, as well as an adult prison programme, within the UK.

And then, just as my time working in South Africa had come to an abrupt halt, my prolonged stay in the UK came to a sudden end. In 1990 Nelson Mandela had been released from prison and in 1994 South Africa had its first democratic election. The door was now open for me to return to my land of birth and to join my extended family in Cape Town. An old university friend of mine, who was now a law professor at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), had kept in touch with me and knew about the work I was doing in the UK. In 1995 he offered me a year-long contract in the Community Law Centre at UWC to write up and publish materials linked to the leadership programme I had been involved in with young men on remand. He felt the work could be applicable locally and tasked me with testing the programme in institutions in SA and Namibia as part of the publication process. That year

back in South Africa provided me and my wife with a glimpse of the work we could do if we returned south.

In 1997 we packed up our house and headed for Cape Town. A year-long contract with South African National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders (NICRO) working on a national staff development programme provided me with the opportunity to travel to all nine provinces and get an overview of the country after an 18-year absence. I was also involved in a think-tank consisting of men with a diverse range of skills, with a view to developing comprehensive programmes for young men at risk in South Africa.

Hearts of Men

After lots of travelling and being away from home, I decided that I wanted to be based in the Western Cape, to be available to support my partner, and spend more time with my sons. Inspired by all the experience I had gained abroad in mentoring processes and in mobilising community volunteers, I worked with Des van Niekerk and Lionel Arnolds to establish Hearts of Men (HOM) in 2001 and we began our first community-based initiative in Bonteheuwel, Cape Town.

In creating Hearts of Men, our purpose was never to build an organisation, but rather to build a team structure to explore the creation of men's circles within communities, to address issues that challenge young men especially – such as male violence and ideas of manhood – and to

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initiate community-based mentoring structures and youth support interventions. Our approach in the early years – and this proved to be the most successful approach – was to work in communities in which our facilitators lived or were directly engaged in. Our programmes expanded rapidly to other communities around Cape Town. A new challenge emerged when we received provincial government funding to facilitate programmes further afield. This development, while spreading our work to more rural communities, proved far more difficult than working close to home. Eventually we managed to fuse both approaches (working locally and at a distance) when the farm Trust that was funding the rural programme we were engaged with asked if they could employ and house one of our best facilitators on their farm so that he could work fulltime on site and live within easy reach of the host communities.

As in my career, the development of HOM took many twists and turns depending on changing circumstances and funding opportunities. Since we were building mentoring initiatives within facilitators' communities, I was encouraged to take up the challenge within my own community and I identified the school that my sons attended as a place in which I could introduce a programme. We mobilised parents as volunteer facilitators and mentors and, with the support of the school, successfully introduced an annual programme for Class/Grade 10 students (15 to 16 years of age). A men's team engaged with the young men and worked alongside a women's team that engaged with the young women. I am proud to say that 20 years later, the programme is still in place and has spread to other schools. It is tremendously rewarding seeing a programme survive over many years, and the successful handover from one team to the next and from one leader to the next. On this programme, mentoring takes place

at all different levels: between elders in the team and new team members, between older and young men, between older and young women. It is rewarding to see the mentoring relationships and friendships that develop between men and women on the teams over many years of community service. All this strengthens my belief that introducing support structures that promote ongoing mentoring and interaction between the generations helps provide a sense of belonging and purpose to a community, for young men and women as well as for their elders.

So, from working in the arts in South Africa and the UK, to working with youngsters at risk and in conflict with the law, to publishing programme materials and resources that have found their way around the world from the UK to the USA, Croatia and Russia, to engaging with young people and finding a creative ways in which the generations can interact for their mutual benefit, this has been a long and interesting journey for me.

In HOM, we identified four phases to our work:

- Develop methodologies, systems and programme content
- Try out all these ideas and test all materials
- Train, mentor and develop people to take this work on independently
- Disperse/distribute materials and experiences for use by future generations and communities.

We have experienced success with our community-based development model. We have good examples of the work continuing independently of HOM, driven by individuals' and communities' passion for the work. If HOM's mission was to light a fire within others and in other places, then our work can be considered a success. In publishing this book, we are



completing the final part of this process, and then our work will be done.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the many organisations, projects and programmes that provided a 'container' for me to develop firstly myself and then later the work of Hearts of Men. Without their presence and the mentoring and support of their leaders, I would not be where I am today.

And finally, I would like to acknowledge the role my immediate and extended family has played in challenging, guiding, teaching, and supporting me on my journey into adulthood, marriage, fatherhood and elderhood. Your love, wisdom, warmth, and companionship have been and continue to be much appreciated.



Nic with his wife, Rebecca Johns



*Everything has a beginning,
And everything has an end.*

*When something ends,
It makes way for something
new to be created.*

*And so now, we pass on to the
next generation,
With the final words, 'Just do
what you can!'*

AFTERWORD

It is 8 March 2021, International Women's Day. I am struck by the news story on BBC TV of the disappearance of a young woman in South London. She has been missing for a week and a suspect has been arrested for her abduction and murder. He serves as a fulltime police officer. I watch as various women are interviewed regarding their personal experiences of reporting incidents of being stalked, intimidated and harassed by men. They describe how they were not taken seriously by the police service. Women don't feel safe from the very men who are supposed to serve and protect them. The coverage then takes the viewers into the chambers of the British Parliament in Westminster. There, a female member of parliament reads a list of about 115 names of women who have died at the hands of men over the past year in the UK. It is reported that in the UK a woman dies at the hands of a man approximately every three days.

In South Africa today, the reality of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and abuse is even more shocking. It is estimated that every three minutes, a woman in South Africa dies at the violent hands of a man, most likely someone known to her, close to her. These bleak statistics reflect the grim reality we face in a world in which women – our mothers, partners, sisters and daughters – are not safe.

I was proud of our president, Cyril Ramaphosa, when he used a COVID-19 address to the nation to acknowledge a different pandemic we are facing in SA. He called it a war

against women, saying it is as if men have declared war, and we are all living in a war zone. Women are the victims, and men are the perpetrators. He went on to express the shame he felt as a man, as a father to two beautiful daughters. On the one hand, I admired our president for openly acknowledging the seriousness of the situation. I do not think I have ever witnessed a head of state addressing the issue so directly on national television. On the other hand, I shared in the shame he expressed, the shame of what is being done in our name – as fathers, husbands, brothers.

In some ways the situation feels overwhelming; abuse against women and children is so widespread that many of us feel powerless to do something about it, to make a significant difference, to turn the tide.

I am reminded of a story told years ago by an elder during an Alternatives to Violence workshop I attended in an American prison. We were engaging with exactly this: feeling overwhelmed and helpless in the face of widespread violence. The elder said he would like to share a short story with us. It went something like this:

'One day a mighty elephant was walking through the bush. While crossing a clearing, he noticed a tiny ant lying on its back with its legs outstretched.

Elephant burst out laughing, and looking down on the tiny creature asked, 'Ant, what are you doing?'

Ant replied, 'Mighty elephant, I am holding up the sky.'



Elephant let out a cry of amusement, 'Little ant, how on earth do you think a tiny thing like you can hold up the sky?' Laughing some more he added, 'Ant, that's just not possible.'

Ant paused for a minute considering what the elephant had said. Ant then replied, 'Maybe that is so, mighty elephant, but one just does what one can.'

We set up Hearts of Men with the purpose of training and supporting men to guide and provide mentorship to youngsters in their communities. We are a small organisation, but over the past 20 years we have worked with several hundred men and boys, fathers and sons in four areas of the Western Cape. Was it worth it? Have we made a significant difference? In the greater scheme of things, no, we have not. Some would argue that the situation regarding violence against women is getting worse. But if we look at it differently, focusing on individuals we have impacted through our work, then yes, we have made a difference. We know we have made a significant difference in the lives of many young men. We know we have had a positive impact on the marriages, relationships and parenting of many older men. And maybe that is good enough.

The problems and challenges we face regarding men, manhood, fatherhood and masculinity are substantial, something like trying to hold up the sky. And as a tiny organisation, we are like the ant on the ground. But, just like the ant, we have done what we could. We didn't sit back. We didn't give up. We tried our best. And that is what we encourage others to do.

With this our final publication, we are now ready to hand over our work to the next generation of community workers, facilitators and programme leaders. As individuals, we will, of course, still mentor and support when requested to do so. But

as an organisation, with all our work and experience now well documented, ready for publication and wider distribution, we have fulfilled our mission.

*Everything has a beginning,
And everything has an end.
When something ends,
It makes way for something new to be created.
And so now, we pass on to the next generation,
With the final words, 'Just do what you can!'*



CLOSING STATEMENT – JANUARY 2023

We have placed our books and manuals on open access sites for free use.

In the Hearts of Men – 2015

The Manhood Experience Parts One & Two – 2017

The Wild at Heart Adventure & Appendices – 2017

Generation to Generation – 2022

For queries concerning any of the above:

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This book brings together thirteen contributors from diverse backgrounds – men & women born in Cameroon, England, Scotland, South Africa, Zambia.

What they all have in common is years of service within their respective communities, working individually and within projects and programmes, with both young people and adults to build social cohesion.

They share stories describing the mentors, teachers, parents, coaches and colleagues, that have guided and inspired them to do the work they do.

They share examples of how they pass on the learnings received from the previous generation, to the next.